



SEALANTS FOR YOUR CHILD

A dental sealant is a plastic material that coats the tooth to protect it from tooth decay. Sealants are routinely placed on the chewing surfaces of back teeth of children to prevent cavities.

Dental sealants have been shown to prevent decay on tooth surfaces with pits and grooves where food and dental plaque can stick to the teeth. They act as a barrier, protecting the enamel from dental plaque and acids that cause tooth decay. Your dentist may suggest using dental sealants on your child's back teeth.

Sealants are generally not used on teeth that already have fillings. They should be used as part of a child's total preventive dental care, which includes good oral hygiene, healthy food choices, optimal fluoride exposure and regular dental visits.

SEALANTS HELP PREVENT TOOTH DECAY

Dental sealants are not meant to replace a good oral hygiene routine. Thorough brushing and flossing help to remove food particles and dental plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth, but tooth-brushing cannot always get into the pits and grooves. Sealants protect these high-risk areas by "sealing out" dental plaque and food. Because decay destroys the structure of the tooth, sealants will help keep teeth sound and intact. Appropriate use of sealants can save time and money and can reduce the need for dental fillings.

SEALANTS AND FLUORIDE

Dental sealants and fluorides work together to prevent tooth decay. Fluorides, such as those used in community water, toothpaste, gels, varnish and mouthwash work best on smooth surfaces of teeth to prevent tooth decay. Sealants keep cavity-causing bacteria out of the grooves of back teeth where decay often begins by covering them with a safe plastic coating.

APPLYING THE DENTAL SEALANT

A sealant is applied by a dental health professional. The procedure is quick, simple and painless. The tooth is cleaned and treated with a solution that allows the sealant to stick to the tooth. The sealant is painted on as a liquid and quickly hardens to form a shield over the tooth. Sometimes a special curing light is used to help the sealant harden.

Placing sealants on teeth shortly after they erupt protects the teeth from developing caries in areas that are hard to brush and where food and bacteria collect.

LIFETIME OF DENTAL SEALANTS

As long as the sealant remains in place, the tooth surface will be protected from decay. Sealants hold up well under the force of normal chewing and usually last several years before another application is needed. Your dentist will check the sealant during your child's regular dental visits to see if it needs to be replaced.

DENTAL SEALANTS ARE NOT ONLY FOR CHILDREN

Because pit and fissure decay begins early in life, children and teenagers are obvious candidates for dental sealants. But some adults with a high risk of decay can benefit from sealants as well.

Talk to your dentist about the benefits of using a dental sealant.

