

Pediatric Dentistry

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Parents Corner

Dental Sealants

Brushing and flossing are the best ways to help prevent cavities, but it's not always easy to clean every nook and cranny of your teeth – especially those back teeth you use to chew. Molars are rough, uneven and a favorite place for leftover food and cavity-causing bacteria to hide.

Still, there's another safety net to help keep those teeth clean. It's called a **sealant**, and it is a thin, protective coating that adheres to the chewing surface of your back teeth. They're no substitute for brushing and flossing, but they cavity causing foods to stick to your molar grooves and crevices and keep cavities from forming

What are dental sealants?

Dental sealants are coatings usually placed on the chewing (occlusal) surface of the permanent back teeth – the molars and premolars – to help protect them from decay.

Why are dental sealants placed on teeth?

The chewing surfaces of the molar and premolar teeth have grooves – "fissures" – that make them vulnerable to decay. These fissures can be deep, difficult to clean, and narrower than even a single bristle of a toothbrush.

Plaque accumulates in these areas. The acid from bacteria in the plaque attacks the enamel and cavities can develop. Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay and protects all the surfaces of the teeth. Dental sealants provide extra protection for the grooved and pitted areas by providing a smooth surface covering the fissured area.

When are dental sealants placed?

Since dental sealants provide such strong prevention against tooth decay, they're typically used with children and teenagers once their molars come in.

Are dental sealants only placed on the chewing surface of molar & premolar permanent teeth?

Dental sealants are usually placed on the chewing surfaces of these teeth because these are the areas and teeth that typically have deep fissures.

Dental sealants are sometimes also used on other permanent teeth if they have grooves or pits to help protect these surfaces. In some children, the molars in the primary dentition (baby teeth) also have grooves that could benefit from dental sealants. In this situation, your dentist or hygienist may recommend dental sealants on the chewing surfaces of these primary teeth.

Can dental sealants be placed on the teeth of adults?

Yes – while less common, dental sealants are sometimes placed in adults at risk for caries on deep grooves and fissures that do not already have fillings or dental sealants.

What do dental sealants look like?

Dental sealants can be clear, white or have a slight tint depending upon the dental sealant used.

How are dental sealants placed?

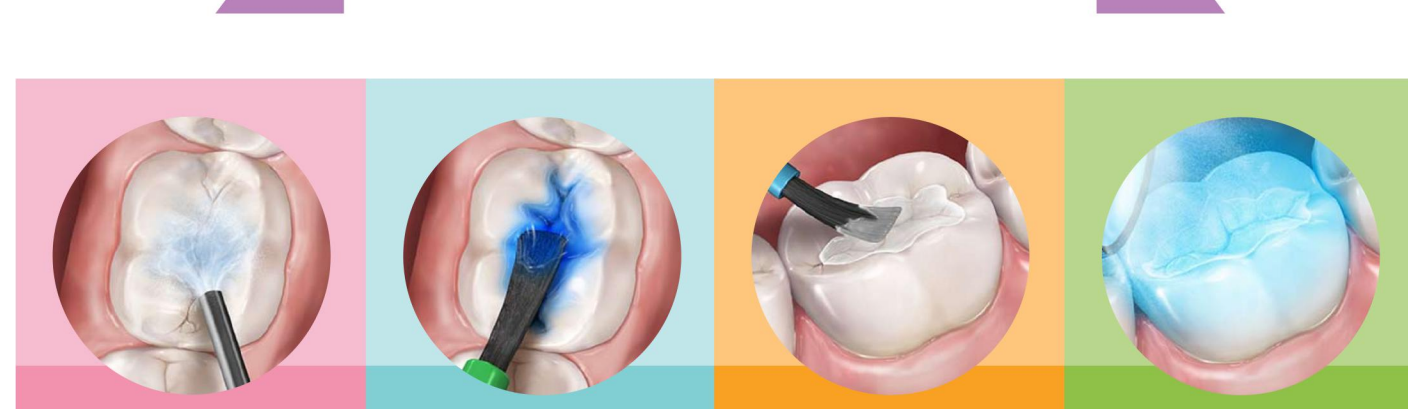
- The tooth surface is thoroughly cleaned with a paste and rotating brush by a dental professional.
- The tooth is washed with water and dried.
- An acidic solution is placed on the fissured area of the tooth's chewing surface for several seconds before being rinsed off. This creates small microscopic areas and a fine rougher surface than the surrounding tooth enamel, which can be seen with a microscope. The rough surface and microscopic areas enable the dental sealant to attach to the tooth.
- After the tooth is dried again, the liquid dental sealant is placed on the tooth and hardened. Dental sealants are hardened by using a light that hardens the dental sealant.
- Once the dental sealant has hardened, it becomes a hard varnish coating, and you can chew on the tooth again.

What do dental sealants look like?

Dental sealants have been used and proven to be effective since the 1970s. Many studies have shown that they are effective in helping prevent decay on chewing (occlusal) surfaces.

Dental sealants can last a while, depending on how well they are maintained. If necessary, it is also possible to place a new dental sealant on the tooth.

How Sealants are Placed



Tooth enamel does not contain any nerves so placing a sealant is painless and does not routinely require numbing. First we will examine the tooth or teeth to be sealed, and if necessary stains and grooves are clean out first using a dental handpiece.

The tooth will then be cleaned and dried. Then we will apply a solution that will clean the surface, to make the sealing material adhere better. The tooth is then rinsed and dried again. The sealant is then painted on the tooth in liquid form and hardens in about a minute, sometimes with the help of a special light. That's all there is to it!

Taking Care of Sealants

Sealed teeth require the same conscientious dental hygiene as unsealed teeth. Your child should continue to brush and floss his or her teeth daily and visit us for regular professional cleanings. It is still possible to get a cavity on sealed teeth so a good diet and hygiene routine is very important.

Please call 650-372-9292 for any additional questions.

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