

Sealants



A single toothbrush bristle is too large to reach inside the fissure

Chewing surface before sealant

Tooth protected by shaded sealant

What are sealants?

Sealants are “plastic” coatings that are used to protect the grooved and pitted surfaces of teeth, especially the chewing surfaces of back teeth where most cavities in children are found. By bonding to the pits and fissures of teeth, the sealant acts as a barrier, protecting enamel from plaque and acids and helping to keep teeth cavity-free.

How do sealants work?

Even if your child brushes and flosses carefully, it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to clean the tiny grooves and pits on certain teeth. Pits and fissures are snug places for plaque and bits of food to hide. Food and bacteria build-up in these crevices, placing your child in danger of tooth decay. Sealants “seal out” food and plaque, thus reducing the risk of decay.

How long do sealants last?

Sealants are temporary, but research has shown that they can last for many years if properly cared for. Since new cavities occur mostly during childhood (adults are more often replacing old fillings rather than having new ones placed), sealants will protect your child throughout his/her most cavity-prone years. If your child has good oral hygiene and avoids biting hard or sticky foods, the sealants will last longer. Chewing ice, not-fully popped popcorn kernels, or hard candy will fracture or pull the sealants off prematurely. Dr. Rebecca will check the sealants during routine dental visits and recommend reapplication or repair as necessary.

How are sealants applied?

The application of sealant is quick and usually takes only one visit. The tooth is first cleaned, conditioned, and dried. The sealant is then flowed, or “painted,” onto the grooves of the tooth and hardened with a special light. Your child will be able to eat right after the appointment.

How much do sealants cost?

The treatment is very affordable, especially in view of the valuable protection from decay it offers your child. Remember, prevention is better than treatment- once a tooth develops a cavity, it is committed to treatment for the rest of its life. Most dental insurance companies cover sealants on permanent teeth. Some companies, however, have limitations on the age and frequency of which the sealants may be applied. We will be happy to ask your benefits provider about your child’s sealant coverage.

Which teeth should be sealed?

The natural flow of saliva usually keeps the smooth surfaces of teeth clean but does not wash out the grooves and fissures. The teeth most at risk of decay, and, therefore, most in need of sealants, are the six-year and twelve-year molars. Many times, the permanent premolars and primary molars will also benefit from sealants, as any tooth with grooves or pits may benefit from their protection. Since each child’s situation is unique, be sure to talk with Dr. Rebecca about her recommendation on sealants for your child.

If my child has sealants, are brushing and flossing still important?

Absolutely! Sealants are only one step in the plan to keep your child cavity-free for a lifetime. Sealants are an aid in preventing tooth decay; in no means are they a guarantee that your child will not develop a cavity. Further, while sealants can help prevent cavities on the top surfaces of your child’s teeth, they do not protect the in-between surfaces of teeth. Flossing is therefore a must! Brushing, flossing, balanced nutrition, limited snacking, and regular dental visits are still essential to a bright, healthy smile.