

## PATIENT'S PAGE



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### Dental Sealants – A Brief Overview

Sealants are thin, plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of teeth – usually the back teeth (premolars and molars) – to prevent tooth decay. The painted-on liquid sealant quickly bonds into the depressions and grooves of the teeth forming a protective shield over the enamel of each tooth.

Although thorough brushing and flossing can remove food particles and plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth, they cannot always get into all the nooks and crannies of the back teeth to remove food and plaque. Sealants protect these vulnerable areas from tooth decay by “sealing out” plaque and food.

#### Who Should Get Sealants?

Because of the likelihood of developing decay in the depressions and grooves of premolars and molars, children and teenagers are obvious candidates for sealants. However, adults without decay or fillings in their molars can also benefit from sealants.

Typically, children should get sealants on their permanent molars and premolars as soon as these teeth come in. The sealants can then protect the teeth through the cavity-prone years of ages 6 to 14.

In some cases, sealants may also be appropriate for those baby teeth with deep depressions and grooves. Because baby teeth play such an important role in holding the correct spacing for permanent teeth, it is important to keep these teeth healthy so they are not lost prematurely.

#### How Are Sealants Applied?

Applying the sealant is a simple and painless process. It takes only a few minutes for your dentist or hygienist to apply the sealant to each tooth. The application steps are as follows:

- First the teeth to be sealed are thoroughly cleaned.
- Each tooth is then dried, and cotton or other absorbent material is put around the tooth to keep it dry.
- An acid solution is put on the chewing surfaces of the teeth to roughen them up, which helps the sealant bond to the teeth.
- The teeth are then rinsed and dried.
- Sealant is then painted onto the tooth enamel, where it bonds directly to the tooth and hardens. Sometimes a special light is used to help the sealant harden.

#### How Long Do Sealants Last?

Sealants can protect the teeth from decay for up to 10 years, but they need to be checked for chipping or wearing at regular dental check-ups. Your dentist can replace sealants as necessary.

### Does Insurance Cover the Cost of Sealants?

Many insurance companies cover the cost of sealants. Check with your dental insurance carrier to determine if sealants are covered under your plan.