

Seal Out TOOTH DECAY

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Institutes of Health



What are dental sealants?

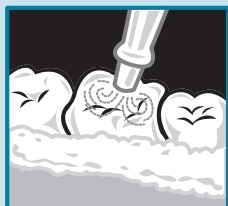
Sealants are thin, plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth (also called premolars and molars).

Sealants are applied in dentists' offices, clinics, and sometimes in schools. Getting sealants is simple and painless. Sealants are painted on as a liquid and quickly harden to form a protective shield over the tooth.

How are sealants applied?



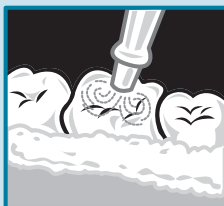
1 The tooth is cleaned.



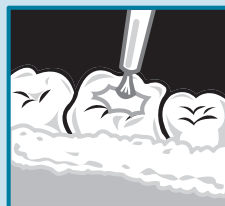
2 The tooth is dried, and cotton is put around the tooth so it stays dry.



3 A solution is put on the tooth that makes the surface a little rough. (It is easier for the sealant to stick to a slightly rough surface.)



4 The tooth is rinsed and dried. Then new cotton is put around the tooth so it stays dry.



5 The sealant is applied as a liquid. Sometimes a special light is used to help the sealant harden.



6 The sealant is in place.

Why get sealants?

Sealants are applied to teeth to prevent tooth decay.

Brushing and flossing teeth can help prevent decay, but it's not always easy to reach the back teeth or clean every tooth surface. Sealants cover the chewing surfaces of the back teeth and keep out germs.

Having sealants applied to teeth before they decay will also save time and money in the long run by avoiding fillings, crowns, or caps used to fix decayed teeth.

What causes tooth decay?

Germs in the mouth use the sugar in food and drinks to make acids. Over time, the acids can make a cavity or hole in the tooth.

Of course, a healthy tooth is the best tooth. So, it is important to prevent decay. That's why sealants are so important.

Why do back teeth decay so easily?

The chewing surfaces of back teeth are rough and uneven because they have small pits and grooves. Food and germs can get stuck in the pits and grooves and stay there for a long time because toothbrush bristles cannot always brush them away.

Who should get sealants?

Children should get sealants on their permanent molars as soon as the teeth come in — before germs attack the teeth.

The first permanent molars — called “6 year molars” — come in between the ages of 5 and 7.

The second permanent molars — “12 year molars” — come in between the ages of 11 and 14.

Other teeth with pits and grooves also might need to be sealed.

Teenagers and young adults who are prone to decay may also need sealants.

Should sealants be put on baby teeth?

Your dentist might think it is a good idea, especially if your child's baby teeth have deep pits and grooves.

Baby teeth save space for adult teeth. It is important to keep baby teeth healthy so they are not lost early.

Does insurance pay for sealants?

Some medical insurance (including Medicaid) and almost all dental insurance pay for sealants. Check with your insurance plan for details.

How long do sealants last?

Sealants can last up to 10 years. But they need to be checked at regular dental visits to make sure they are not chipped or worn away. The dentist or dental hygienist can repair sealants by adding more sealant material.



What if a small cavity is accidentally covered by a sealant?

The decay will not spread, because it is sealed off from its food and germ supply.

Are sealants new?

No, sealants have been around since the 1960s. Studies by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research and others led to the development of dental sealants and showed that they work well and are safe.

Besides sealants, are there other ways to prevent tooth decay?

Yes. Brushing and flossing teeth regularly and avoiding sugary foods and drinks can help protect teeth from decay.

Choose a toothpaste that contains fluoride and ask the dentist or pediatrician about other kinds of fluoride that can help keep your child's teeth healthy.

Fluoride...

- makes teeth more resistant to decay by strengthening the tooth enamel
- repairs tiny areas of decay before they become big cavities by replacing the lost minerals that make teeth strong



How can I get dental sealants for my children?

Talk to a dentist, state or local dental society, or health department. Sometimes sealants are applied at school. Check with your school about whether it has a sealant program.



National Institute of Dental
and Craniofacial Research

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