

Sealants

What are sealants?

Sealants help protect against cavities. A sealant is a plastic resin that is bonded to the surface of primary and permanent teeth. Teeth have pits and fissures in the center crevice that may be deep, distinguished and accumulate stain and food. If food and bacteria become trapped in these deep grooves, it may lead to tooth decay. Sealants are primarily applied to the back molars of children and young adults, even though it is sometimes used on other teeth. The idea is to seal and protect the areas where decay usually approaches. Sealants do a great job, but do not protect areas in between the teeth. It's an easy procedure that can be done without any discomfort during a regular office examination.

Who is a good candidate for sealants?

Children and young adults need to be evaluated on an individual basis by the dentist. A child may have good oral hygiene, but food still may become trapped in certain cavity-prone areas. Sealants are most often applied to the six-year molars of children between the ages of 5 and 8, and to the 12-year molars of children between the ages of 11 and 13.

How are sealants applied?

First, the tooth is cleaned and dried. Next, the dentist flows the sealant on the tooth - which is mixed with a bonding agent. The sealant is cured or hardened with a light. The patient may be able to feel the change in the tooth's surface, and the surface may need to be adjusted for comfort. The sealant may initially have a funny taste. A patient may eat food shortly after the sealant is applied.

How durable are sealants?

Sealants are hard to dislodge and very resistant to force. However, a sealant may chip like a tooth if hit incorrectly when biting down. In most cases, sealants last four to eight years, and patients can have them refreshed after that time if necessary. A dentist should check sealants during a regular examination.

Why would you want sealants?

Research has shown that sealants -- which were developed in the 1960s and 1970s -- are a proven and effective means of preventing decay. Dentists attribute the use of sealants to one of the reasons why so many teenagers graduate from high school with their teeth intact and without decay. Decay is still the most chronic disease among children.