

Reduce Cavities With Sealants

Submitted by:

Brett H. Taylor, D.D.S.



TAYLOR
DENTISTRY
Pediatric & General Dentistry

What are dental sealants?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings applied to the grooves in teeth, which are commonly found on the biting surfaces of back teeth. Sealants help reduce the risk of cavities in these grooves.

How do sealants work to reduce the risk of cavities?

The sealant fills in the narrow grooves that cavity-causing bacteria can enter. Typically, these grooves cannot be cleaned with toothbrushing due to the thickness of the bristles and the narrowness of the groove. Pictured is a microscopic image of a toothbrush bristle and a groove of a tooth. Note how the bristle cannot reach to clean inside the groove. The sealant fills this void and prevents the plaque, bacteria, and stain from sitting in the groove.



Which teeth are suitable for sealants?

Any tooth that has a deep groove or pit can benefit from a sealant. Permanent molars are the most common teeth to be sealed. It is best if the sealant is applied soon after the permanent molars have erupted (usually around ages 6 and 12), before the teeth have a chance to decay. Sealants can also be placed on primary (baby) molars and in adults if deep grooves are present and the patient has additional risk factors that increase the susceptibility to cavities.

How are sealants applied?

Applying sealants does not require drilling or removing tooth structure. It is an easy three-step process: A dentist or dental hygienist cleans the tooth. A liquid that helps bonding is placed gently on the tooth and is washed off. Finally, the sealant is painted on the tooth and cured (hardened) with a blue light. It takes about a minute for the sealant to form a protective shield.

Are sealants visible?

Sealants are visible but only with close examination. Sealants can be clear, white, or slightly tinted, and cannot be seen when talking or smiling. Typically only your dentist will be able to see the sealants.

Will sealants make teeth feel different?

Following placement, the surface of the sealant can initially feel slightly different. Sealants, however, are very thin and only fill the pits and grooves on teeth and will not affect the teeth from properly fitting together.

Do sealants have BPA?

Most sealant material is BPA-free. Ask your dentist about BPA-free sealants.

Why is sealing a tooth better than waiting for decay and filling the cavity?

Sealants help maintain sound, intact teeth. Decay destroys the structure of the tooth. Each time a tooth is filled or a filling is replaced, additional tooth structure is lost. Sealants help prevent that process from beginning. Studies have proven that the appropriate use of sealants can save time, money, and tooth structure.

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