

All About Sealants

Q. What are sealants?

A. Sealants protect the grooved chewing surfaces of back teeth where most cavities in children are found. Made of clear or tooth colored plastic, sealants are applied to these surfaces of the tooth to help keep them cavity-free.

Q. How do sealants work?

A. Even if your child brushes and flosses carefully, it is difficult – sometimes impossible –to clean the tiny grooves and pits on certain teeth. Food and bacteria build up in these crevices, placing your child in danger of tooth decay. Sealants "seal out" food and plaque, reducing the risk of decay.

Q. How long do sealants last?

A. Research shows that sealants can last for several years if properly cared for. So, your child should be protected throughout the most cavity-prone years. If your child has good oral hygiene and avoids biting hard objects, sealants will last longer. Dr. Fern will check the sealants during routine dental visits and can recommend reapplication or repair when necessary.

Q. What is the treatment like?

A. The application of a sealant is quick and comfortable. It takes only one visit. First, the tooth is cleaned, conditioned and dried. The sealant is then flowed onto the grooves of the tooth and hardened with a special light. Your child will be able to eat right after the appointment.

Q. Are sealants safe?

A. Yes. The flowable plastic used is safe, and the light used to harden the plastic is a special wavelength that is completely safe. It is not a laser or an X-ray.

Q. How much does it cost?

A. The treatment is very affordable, especially in view of the valuable decay protection it offers your child.

Q. Which teeth should be sealed?

A. The natural flow of saliva usually keeps the smooth surfaces of teeth clean but does not wash out the grooves and fissures. So, the teeth most at risk of decay – and therefore most in need of sealants – are the permanent molars; the 6 year and 12 year molars. Many times the permanent premolars and baby molars will also benefit from sealant coverage. Any tooth surface with nooks and crannies can benefit from the protection of sealants. Sealants offer no benefit to smooth flat surfaces, so we don't apply them to those areas.

Q. Are sealants used on baby teeth?

A. Not usually, unless there is a special situation.

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

A. Absolutely! Sealants are only one step in the plan to keep your child cavity-free. Brushing, flossing, fluoride, balanced nutrition, limited snacking with good choices, and regular dental visits are still essential for a bright, healthy smile.

Q. Do you recommend sealants for all children?

A. No, just like your child is an individual, so are their teeth. I examine, evaluate, and discuss sealants with you based on the specific needs for your child.