

## Follow Up

The dentist or hygienist will look at the sealants at each regular dental checkup. Problems are rare and can almost always be corrected. Call the dentist if the sealants interfere with chewing or cause any sensitivity in your child's mouth.



## How Long Do Sealants Last?

Sealants can last for 3 to 5 years. If they chip or come off, they can easily be replaced. Any problems can be detected and corrected at your child's regular dental checkups. As long as the sealants are in place, decay is less likely to develop in the grooves. You can help the sealants last by encouraging your child not to chew on ice cubes or hard or sticky candy.

## Tips for Healthy Teeth

Sealants protect the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, but they don't take the place of brushing and other steps to prevent decay. Help your child do the following:



- **Brush and floss daily** to remove bacteria and plaque and help keep the gums healthy.
- **Get regular fluoride treatments.** Along with fluoride toothpaste and fluoridated drinking water, fluoride treatments help protect the smooth surfaces of your child's teeth from decay.
- **See the dentist regularly.** Checkups every 6 months help detect any problems early.
- **Eat a good diet.** Your child needs plenty of protein, whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. Limiting foods that are high in sugar (such as soft drinks, cookies, juices, and sweetened cereals) reduces the risk of tooth decay.

# Sealants

Protect Your Child's Teeth From Decay



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This brochure is not intended as a substitute for professional dental care.

## What Are Sealants?

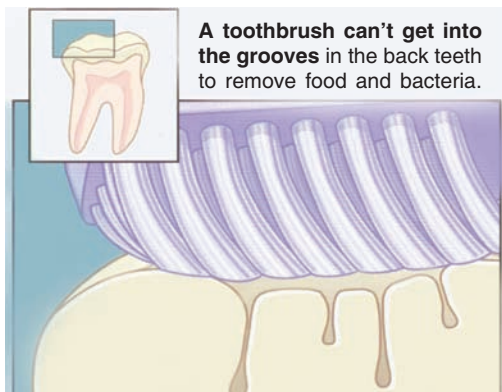
Sealants are a safe, painless, and low-cost way to help protect your child's back teeth from decay. Sealants have been used on children's teeth for more than 20 years. A thin, plastic, tooth-colored or clear coating (**sealant**) is bonded to the chewing surfaces of the molars and premolars. This forms a hard shield that keeps food and bacteria from getting into the tiny grooves in the teeth and causing decay.

## Why Should Children Have Sealants?

The chewing surfaces of the back teeth have tiny grooves that form as each tooth develops. This is where most decay occurs in children. That's because the bristles of a toothbrush can't get down into the grooves to remove the food and bacteria that get trapped there.

## Which Teeth Should Be Sealed?

Usually the molars and premolars are sealed. Fluoride helps protect the smooth surfaces on the front teeth and on the sides of the back teeth. But only sealants can keep food and bacteria from getting into the grooves on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth.



A toothbrush can't get into the grooves in the back teeth to remove food and bacteria.

## When Should Children Get Sealants?

Sealants should be applied as soon as the first permanent molars (6-year molars) erupt (come in). This occurs between 5 and 7 years of age. The second molars (12-year molars) and the premolars should be sealed as soon as they erupt, between 11 and 14 years of age. That's because the greatest chance of decay occurs during the first year after the teeth erupt. However, it's never too late to apply sealants, as long as the teeth are free of decay and fillings.

## What About Baby Teeth?

The baby molars often don't need to be sealed. However, your dentist may recommend sealing the baby molars if there is a high risk of decay. Since baby teeth are "space holders," losing baby molars from decay can cause crowding when the permanent teeth come in.

## How Long Does Sealing Take?

Generally, all the back teeth can be sealed in one 30- to 60-minute office visit.

Sealants fill the grooves to keep food and bacteria out.



## How Are Sealants Applied?

The dentist or other trained staff person in the dentist's office applies the sealants. There's no numbing and no pain. The treatment is done in three steps.

**1 The teeth are cleaned, dried, and etched so the sealant will adhere.** Any plaque (a bacterial film) is first removed from the teeth. Cotton rolls are placed around the teeth to keep them dry. Then each tooth is treated with a mild etching solution to kill any bacteria and make the surface slightly rough. A rough surface helps the sealant adhere better.

**2 The sealant is painted on and hardened.** The chewing surface of each tooth is painted with liquid sealant, using a small brush or applicator. Spaces between the teeth are not painted, so your child can still floss between each tooth. The sealant is then hardened, usually with a special light.



**3 The sealant is carefully checked.** Each tooth is examined to be sure that the grooves are fully covered and that the sealant won't interfere with chewing. The sealant bonds to the tooth as it hardens, so your child can eat normally right away.