



DENTAL SEALANTS

What are dental sealants?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth to prevent decay. Most tooth decay in children and teenagers occurs on the chewing surfaces where pits and grooves tend to trap food and bacteria. Sealants fill in these pits and grooves so that bacteria cannot multiply and cause decay.¹



Unsealed

Sealed

How are sealants applied?

Applying sealants is a simple procedure done by a dental hygienist or a dentist. First, the teeth are cleaned. Then the teeth to be sealed are dabbed with a very mild acid solution similar in strength to vinegar or lemon juice. This roughens the tooth surface slightly so the sealant will bond to it.

After the tooth is prepared, the sealant is painted onto the tooth. It flows into the pits and grooves, and a special light hardens the sealant in about 60 seconds. After sealing, bacteria cannot reach the pits and grooves and cause decay.¹

Getting sealants is totally painless. No drilling or shots are necessary. Sealants take about five minutes per tooth. As soon as they are dry, normal activities are fine.

Will sealants make teeth feel different?

Sealants will not result in any change in bite because they are very thin and only fill the pits and grooves. At first they may feel somewhat bulky, but a few days of normal chewing will wear the sealants into place.



How long will dental sealants last?

A sealant application can last as long as five years and often longer. Sealants should be checked regularly and reapplied if they wear off. Because teeth are more likely to decay when they first appear in the mouth, dental sealants are recommended for children and teenagers.¹

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

Sealants help to keep teeth healthy by protecting them from decay. Decay destroys parts of the tooth. Each time a tooth is filled or a filling is replaced, more tooth is lost. Silver fillings last about six to eight years before they need to be replaced. Using sealants saves time and money and helps to keep teeth healthy.¹

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-744-4554 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resource

1. American Dental Association. 2014. *Sealants*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved February 16, 2015 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/sealants>