Dental Sealants

What are dental sealants?
Dental sealants are recommended by the American Dental Association as a safe and effective way to prevent cavities. Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that cover the surfaces of teeth. The sealant protects the tooth surfaces and helps keep germs and food particles out of the grooved surfaces of the teeth. Sealants are usually placed on the back teeth (the molars) because most dental decay occurs on the chewing surface of teeth. Molars are more vulnerable to decay because they are the primary teeth used for chewing. Your dentist may seal other teeth in addition to the molars if he thinks a particular tooth needs extra protection.

Why are dental sealants important?
Sealants prevent cavities; they can protect teeth from damage caused by tooth decay (cavities).

How are sealants applied?
Applying sealants is a short and easy process; it is both safe and painless. After the tooth is cleaned, a special gel is placed on the chewing surface for a few seconds. The tooth is then washed off and dried. The sealant is painted on the chewing surface of the tooth, and a light is shined on the tooth to quickly harden the sealant. It only takes a minute for the sealant to form a protective shield.

What do they look like?
Sealants can be clear, white or slightly tinted and can only be seen up close; they are not seen when a child talks or smiles.

Can my child feel them?
A child may feel the sealant with their tongue for the first few days, especially because it is new in their mouth. That sensation will disappear after a few days.

How long will it last?
A sealant can last for as long as 5 to 10 years. Your dentist will check the sealant’s strength at your regular appointments and will reapply as needed.

Who needs dental sealants?
Everyone benefits from dental sealants, but it is most common to have sealants applied when someone is a child. Children are especially vulnerable to tooth decay—tooth decay typically affect 50% of all children aged 12-15 but only 1 in 5 children have dental sealants. The proposed Healthy People 2020 objective is to increase the proportion of children with dental sealants on their molar teeth.

When is my child at risk?
Primary permanent teeth typically come in when a child is 5-7 years old, and secondary molar eruptions usually take place at 11-14 years old. Dental sealants should be applied as soon as these teeth erupt.

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