



# Helping Hands

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## SEALANTS

Sealants are plastic coatings that protect the grooves and pits on the chewing surface of the back teeth or molars. Even if your child brushes and flosses carefully, it is impossible to clean the tiny grooves and pits on certain teeth. Current research has shown that 4 out of 5 cavities in children between the ages of 6 and 15 develop on the biting surface of back molars.

Even if your child brushes and flosses carefully, food and bacteria can accumulate in these crevices, placing your child at risk for tooth decay. Sealants are adhesive plastic coatings that are applied to the tops of teeth and they "seal out" the plaque, acid, and bacteria.

Sealants can last for many years as long as they are properly cared for and maintained at a routine six-month interval. Good oral hygiene and avoiding biting hard objects will help prolong the lifespan of the sealant. Your dentist will check the sealants during routine dental visits to inform you if repair or reapplication is necessary. As long as the child is being seen in our office for routine six-month recall appointments, the sealants will be guaranteed by our office for 24 months. Reapplications and repair will be done at no charge, and if bacteria leaks underneath the sealant during this time causing a cavity, the price of the sealant will be credited towards the filling fee.

Sealants are typically placed on permanent six-year and twelve-year molars. These teeth must have come through the gums tissues far enough to keep all of the grooves very dry as the sealant is applied as the sealant material will not stick to a wet tooth. Often times, a rubber dam, or "raincoat" is placed on the molar to help keep the tooth dry as the sealant is applied. Typically, the sealant appointment is scheduled once all four of the molars have erupted. The tooth is cleaned and conditioned. The sealant material is then flowed into the grooves of the tooth and a special light is used to harden the material. Your child will be able to eat right after the appointment if only sealants have been placed. The sealants may feel "chewy" or as if the child has taffy stuck in their teeth for 48 hours, but this feeling will resolve on its own.

Most dental insurance companies cover sealants. Some companies, however, have age and specific tooth limitations regarding the placement of sealants. We urge you to contact your benefits coordinator to ensure that our office can help you maximize your insurance coverage. However, remember that it is much more economical over a child's lifetime to prevent cavities than to maintain fillings, especially on permanent teeth.

Finally, keep in mind that sealants are only effective on the grooves and pits of teeth. They are only one piece of the puzzle in maintaining a cavity-free mouth! Brushing, flossing, a balanced diet with limited snacking, and regular dental visits are still an essential part of maintaining a healthy smile!