



Smart Mouth

Fight Decay with Dental Sealants

A child's first permanent molars erupt around age 6. These first molars come in behind the child's baby molars. As soon as they are fully erupted, it is time to think of protecting them against decay. The grooves in the chewing surfaces of the molars are an ideal area for the decay-causing bacteria and food to be trapped. Many times the grooves are quite deep and the toothbrush bristles cannot completely remove the bacterial plaque—even if the child is a good brusher.

Parents should talk to their dentist about applying sealants. A sealant provides a barrier to the chewing surfaces, protecting the teeth against decay-causing bacteria. It only takes a few minutes to apply a sealant and it does not require anesthetic.

First, the tooth is cleaned, then conditioned with an agent that helps the sealant material adhere to the tooth surface. Next, the plastic material is applied and hardens with the help of a special light. Right away the sealant is completely hardened and there is no waiting time to eat or drink.



Sealants hold up well under the force of normal chewing and usually last several years before reapplication is needed. While sealants remain intact, the tooth surface is protected. During the child's regular dental visits, the dentist will check the condition of the sealants and reapply when necessary.

Most dental insurance policies provide coverage for sealants on children under their preventive benefit. Dental insurance usually does not pay for sealants on adults. However, adults can also benefit from sealants. Talk to your dentist in regard to your needs.

In addition to sealants, children can work toward a healthy smile by:

- ◆ Brushing twice each day with a fluoride toothpaste (Parents should brush for the child at least once a day until around age 8)
- ◆ Flossing (Parents should assist the child until he can floss without injuring his gums)
- ◆ Eating healthy foods/limiting sugary foods
- ◆ Playing safely/wearing a mouthguard for sporting activities
- ◆ Visiting the dentist twice a year