

# Sealants: A Simple Way to Fight Tooth Decay

Does it feel like pulling teeth to get your child to brush and floss every day? Instilling good hygiene in your little one can often be a struggle, but you don't have to fight this battle alone! Pediatric dentists can help you win the war on tooth decay simply by applying a protective barrier, or "sealant", to the surface of your child's teeth.

Invisible yet effective, this just might be the secret weapon you've been looking for.

## Why Dental Sealant May Be Necessary

Teaching your child to brush and floss properly (and regularly) can take some time, but it doesn't take long for harmful plaque and bacteria to damage teeth. Because baby teeth play a critical role in the alignment of permanent teeth, speech development and proper chewing skills, keeping them free of decay is critical.

Many pediatric dentists will recommend dental sealant as a safeguard for the back teeth — particularly the molars, since they are primarily used for chewing and tend to have a deeply pitted and grooved surface. Front teeth tend to be smoother and may not need sealant at all, but it may still be recommended depending on your child's oral health and hygiene.

## When to Seek Treatment

Sealant can be applied at any time, but for maximum benefit, ask your pediatric dentist for it the moment your child's back teeth have fully erupted. Chipping and other forms of wear and tear are normal, so expect the need for reapplication every few years.

As baby teeth fall out, don't forget to ask your child's dentist about applying sealant to his or her new set of teeth as well. While treating baby teeth with dental sealant is a fairly new trend, coating permanent teeth with this protective barrier is a common practice to help prevent tooth decay.

## How Dental Sealants Are Applied

The process for applying dental sealant is fairly quick and usually requires only a few minutes to complete. A standard cleaning is necessary to prepare the teeth, followed by a thorough drying of each tooth with the help of gauze or other absorbent material. Next, an acid solution is applied by the dentist, which will help the sealant bond to the tooth's surface. After a round of rinsing and drying, the dental sealant is then applied onto the surface of the tooth. The final step is to harden the sealant with a curing light.



## **Other Ways to Combat Tooth Decay**

As easy and effective as it is, dental sealant is but one form of preventative care, and only protects the more accessible surface your child's teeth. Even with sealants, it is possible that your child may still get tooth decay, especially between teeth where the sealant cannot be placed. Staying on top of your child's dental regimen and diet is still the best way to stop tooth decay before it starts, especially in areas between the teeth that can only be reached by flossing.

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### **Sources:**

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