

Dental Sealants

Dental sealants play an important role in preventing caries (cavities) on primary and permanent teeth. The teeth that benefit from sealants the most are the permanent molars, which are the teeth located in the back of the mouth. "Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the grooves on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth to protect them from tooth decay. Most tooth decay in children and teens occurs on these surfaces. Sealants protect the chewing surfaces from tooth decay by keeping germs and food particles out of these grooves" (CDC, 2009). Permanent molars will normally have deep grooves, which makes it difficult for children and even adults to keep these areas clean. Your child's first permanent molars will erupt around the age of 6, these molars are also called the 6 year molars. The next set of molars erupt around the age of 12, these molars are also called the 12 year molars.

Dental sealants have been proven to be more than 90% effective in preventing tooth decay in the grooves of the teeth. The grooves of teeth are located on the chewing surfaces of the teeth and sometimes the grooves can be on the tongue side and cheek side of these teeth as well. "Decay damages teeth permanently. Sealants protect them. Sealants can save time, money, and the discomfort sometimes associated with dental fillings. Fillings are not permanent. Each time a tooth is filled, more drilling is done and the tooth becomes a little weaker" (CDC, 2009).

In some cases a child could even benefit from sealants on their primary (baby) molars. Some children have very deep grooves on these teeth and it is harder for both the parent and child to keep those grooves clean. Maintaining primary (baby) teeth as long as possible is extremely important. If a child has a tooth extracted due to decay, then it is possible that a space maintainer may have to be placed in order to maintain the space for the permanent tooth to erupt. The tooth may also be filled if the carious lesion is small enough, but recurrent decay may form. This means more tooth structure would be removed. If the tooth is left untreated, the carious lesion may then spread to other teeth in the mouth. The life expectancy of a sealant is 3-5 years. Every time your child visits their dentist for a preventive care appointment the sealants should be checked to make sure they are still in place.

Placing dental sealants is a short process and does not remove any tooth structure. No numbing is required. The tooth is cleaned with a prophylaxis angle (spinning toothbrush) before the sealant process begins. Once the tooth is cleaned, it is dried and a gel material is placed on the chewing surfaces for a few seconds. The tooth is rinsed off with water and then dried to get

ready for the sealant material. The sealant material is then placed on the tooth and a curing light will harden the sealant.

Even if sealants are placed it is still extremely important to brush and floss at least twice a day. Having fluoride in drinking water and having fluoride treatments at dental visits also helps to prevent caries (cavities). Sealants, brushing, flossing and fluoride all help play a big role in optimal oral health. Sealants help prevent caries (cavities) in the grooves of the teeth. Brushing helps fight caries (cavities) and gum disease. Flossing helps prevent caries (cavities) between the teeth and also helps fight gum disease. Fluoride helps prevent caries (cavities) on the smooth surfaces of the teeth.

References:

http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/publications/factsheets/sealants_faq.htm