

Dental sealants

Sealants are thin (white or clear) plastic coatings that stick or bond to the surfaces of teeth. They are used to cover the chewing surface of back teeth to help prevent tooth decay. Sealants do not dissolve in saliva and are safe. They were developed in the 1960s and have been widely used since this time.

Sealants block the physical effects of early tooth decay

A combination of sealants (on teeth) and fluoride (in water or toothpaste) will virtually eliminate decay in the permanent (adult) teeth of many children.

In children:

- Fluoride in the water supply and toothpaste, and the School Dental Program, have reduced tooth decay.
- Decay is now much less common, although preventable decay still occurs.
- Most decay starts in the narrow pits and grooves on the biting surfaces of teeth in the back of the mouth. These narrow pits and grooves are too small for the bristles of toothbrushes to get in to clean.
- Bacteria from plaque living in the grooves can make acid, which may cause tooth decay.

Sealants fill up the grooves

Sealants painlessly fill and block up grooves that are too small for the toothbrush to clean.

Sealants:

- Are applied by a dentist, dental therapist or oral health therapist
- Fill and block up the small pits and grooves in the teeth to prevent decay
- Harden to form a tough layer that prevents decay occurring.
- Take a few minutes to apply to the teeth
- Are painless
- Do not require injections
- Do not require drilling.
- Can last from two to seven years, but may last up to 15 years
- Your dentist, dental therapist or oral health therapist should check sealants regularly.

Sealants are usually placed on permanent molars

The permanent molars found in the back of the mouth have the highest risk of tooth decay and benefit the most from the application of dental sealants. In most children, the first permanent molars appear about age six or seven years and the second molars about age 11 or 12 years.

How sealants are put on teeth

To apply sealants, the dental care provider will:

- **Prepare teeth** – clean and dry the tooth or teeth
- **Apply sealant** – a thin layer of plastic liquid is painted into the groove or pit, similar to how nail polish is painted onto a fingernail
- **Set sealant** – sealant is finally set using a special light.

Other tips for healthy teeth

Correct cleaning of your teeth and a healthy diet also helps to eliminate dental decay. Remember to:

- Clean your teeth at least twice a day after meals
- Eat a healthy diet and enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods
- Limit sugary foods and sweets especially between meals
- Drink plenty of tap water especially fluoridated water
- Have regular dental check-ups.

Where to get help

- Your dentist or oral health professional
- Your public oral health service
- Community dental clinic Tel. 1300 360 054
- The Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne, general dental enquiries Tel. (03) 9341 1000 or 1800 833 039 (from rural Victoria) Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm
- Emergency Service Tel. 1300 360 054 Monday to Friday; 8.30am to 9.15pm, weekends and public holidays 9am to 9.15pm.

All children who are 12 years and under are eligible for priority public oral health services. Children receive general oral health advice as well as dental check-ups and treatment. For eligibility information, Dental Health Services Victoria Tel. 1300 360 054

Things to remember

- Sealants are applied onto teeth to protect them and prevent tooth decay.
- Sealants fill up the small grooves and pits on your teeth that are hard to clean.
- Regular cleaning of teeth, eating a healthy diet, limiting sugary foods and drinking plenty of tap water also helps to prevent tooth decay.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Dental Health Services Victoria

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