

# Sealants offer added protection against cavities

By KIM GLOVER, R.D.H.

Have you heard of dental sealants? A lot of people haven't. A dental sealant is a protective plastic coating that dental professionals apply to teeth. They are "painted" onto the chewing surfaces of molars and sometimes premolars. The chewing surface of these teeth naturally have grooves that can hide microscopic cavity-causing bacteria. These grooves are often so narrow that toothbrush bristles cannot clean the food and bacteria out. Left alone, a cavity may form. However, if the tooth is "sealed" the grooves are filled in with sealant, which lowers the chance of a cavity developing on the surface.

What are the limitations of sealants? Sealants only bond to the



grooves and dimples of teeth. For example, we can apply a sealant to the chewing surface, but sealants will not stick to the smooth sides of teeth. I tell my patients that they will still have to brush and floss after the sealant has been placed.

Who can benefit from sealants? Anyone. Generally, we place sealants when adult first molars have come in fully — around ages six to

seven — then again when the second molars have come in, around ages 12 to 14. Sometimes we seal baby molars, depending upon the depth of the grooves, and how well a child can tolerate the three-minute procedure.

Does getting a sealant hurt? Absolutely not! The most difficult part for a patient is holding their mouth open as we apply the sealant. The tooth must stay perfectly dry from start until finish, or we have to start the sealant over.

How much does a sealant cost? Will my dental insurance help? The average fee for a dental sealant in Oregon is around \$49 per tooth. Most dental insurances seem to cover a large part, if not all, of the



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fee. As most insurance companies have multiple plans with different coverages, it may be wise for parents to call their insurance company for plan specifics.

Dentavid.com has posted a great kid-friendly explainer video on YouTube about dental sealants. Just search for "Dental sealants for children."

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