

Dental sealants can protect your children from cavities. Sealants are applied to the chewing surfaces of molars to act as a wall between the tooth and harmful germs.



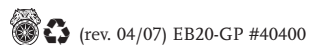
Sealants can stop cavities before they begin



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Texas CHIP Dental Services
Delta Dental Insurance Company
P.O.Box 537014
Sacramento, CA 95853-7014



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Children and tooth decay

Children are more likely to get cavities because of the natural shape of the growing teeth. When their first adult molars come in around age 6, deep areas called *pits* and *grooves* form on the chewing surfaces of these back teeth. These areas are so small that the bristles of a toothbrush can't reach into them. This makes the deep areas harder to clean, which makes it a lot easier for germs to grow and for tooth decay to start.

What children eat also leads to cavities because their diets can include a lot of snacking.

Children can brush their own teeth by the age of 6, but they may not be doing a good job. They hardly ever brush as often and as long as they should; children should brush their teeth for at least 2 minutes.

Sealants prevent cavities

Dental sealants can keep your children from getting tooth decay. Sealants are put on the chewing surfaces of their new adult molars to act as a wall between the tooth and the harmful germs that cause cavities. They should be put on when the teeth first come in. Here's how sealants work: a fluid is put on the tooth to make the

top surface a little rough (this helps to make the sealant stick to the tooth surface better). The sealant is "painted" onto the tooth surface, and then a light is used to help harden the sealant on the tooth. The sealant fills in the tooth's pits and grooves to make a thin plastic cover over the tooth. The sealant keeps cavity-causing germs out of the deep areas.

Sealants are fast and painless

Your child will be happy to know that with sealants, there is no drilling and no pain. Either your dentist or a dental hygienist can put the sealants on your child's teeth. Having them put on takes less time than having a tooth filled.

After many years in use, sealants have been proven to be safe, long-lasting and useful. Under most programs, sealants are covered when applied to first molars up to age 9 and second molars up to age 14.

Ask your dentist about how your child can benefit from sealants.

Keeping your child's teeth healthy

At-home care (brushing and flossing after every meal) can help keep your child's dental problems at a low level. From age 2, children should begin to brush their own teeth with a parent's help. Use a small, soft brush with a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. After age 8, children can brush and floss alone, though parents should check them once in a while to make sure they're doing a good job.

Children need a balanced diet to help their bodies, minds and teeth grow strong.

Make sure your child drinks plenty of milk and eats other calcium-rich foods, such as yogurt and cheese. These foods can fight the bad effects of other foods that children eat, like sticky candies and starchy foods.

With a parent's help, check-ups at the dentist's office, and brushing and flossing at home, children are on their way to having healthy habits for life.