

## WHAT ARE SEALANTS?



Sealants protect teeth from decay. As teeth develop, grooves and ridges form on the chewing surfaces of a tooth. Food and bacteria collect in these grooves and cause decay. These surfaces can be protected with a plastic coating that prevents bacteria and food from sticking to your child's tooth. Sealants fill up these grooves and allow food to slide off the tooth surface. Combined with fluoridated water and topical fluorides (mouth rinses & tooth-paste), sealants virtually eliminate decay on the chewing surfaces of your child's teeth. The American Dental Association's latest studies indicate that children who had sealants applied to their teeth had a 6% cavity rate on the chewing surfaces of these teeth. Those children without sealants had a 59% cavity rate.

To apply a sealant, the operator cleans each tooth and then etches it with a mild acid wash to give the sealant a rougher surface to cling to on the tooth enamel. The plastic coating is then applied and cured with a special light. Excess sealant is put on the tooth, and the sealant may feel high for a day or so until the sealant is shaped by the opposing tooth. No "shots" are needed when sealants are placed on your child's tooth. Kids appreciate this!

Sealants are not a guarantee against decay. Sealants can only reduce the risk of decay on the chewing surface of your child's tooth, not on the areas between the teeth. Sealants protect the chewing surfaces of the back premolars and molars where decay occurs most often. Your child still needs to brush and floss daily between his/her teeth. How long a sealant will last on a tooth depends on your child's chewing, eating, and grinding habits. Repair of a sealant may be needed after three to five years as the borders of the sealant may be weakened by this time. Regular dental examinations are needed every 6 months to check the condition of the sealants and to evaluate if reapplication is needed.

**HOME CARE FOR SEALANTS:** Do not clean or scrape the sealant with hard utensils such as a toothpick or home dental instruments. Limit your child's eating of hard or sticky candy. Do not let your child chew ice cubes as biting on ice cubes can fracture a sealant or even the tooth.