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# Dental Sealants Help Protect Teeth



**Jeff Kinner, DDS**

653 N Town Center Drive

Phone: 838-9013

**A**dental sealant (also called a pit and fissure sealant) is a protective, professionally-applied material that is put on the chewing surfaces of back teeth to prevent cavities. Sealants provide a physical barrier so that cavity-causing bacteria cannot invade the pits and fissures on the chewing surfaces of teeth.

### **Why should my child get dental sealants?**

Since the early 1970s, childhood dental caries on smooth tooth surfaces (those without pits and fissures) has declined markedly because of widespread exposure to fluorides. By 1986-1987, approximately 90 percent of the decay in children's teeth occurred in tooth surfaces with pits and fissures, and almost two-thirds were found on the chewing surfaces alone.<sup>1</sup> Dental sealants have been shown to prevent decay on tooth surfaces with pits and fissures. Sealants have been approved for use for many years and are recommended by professional health associations and public health agencies.

### **When should my child get dental sealants?**

First permanent molars erupt into the mouth at about age 6 years. Placing sealants on these teeth shortly after they erupt protects them from developing caries in areas of the teeth where food and bacteria collect. If sealants were applied routinely to susceptible tooth surfaces in conjunction with the appropriate use of fluoride, most tooth decay in children could be prevented.

Second permanent molars erupt into the mouth at about age 12 years. Pit and fissure surfaces of these teeth are as susceptible to dental caries as the first permanent molars of younger children. Therefore, young teens need to receive dental sealants shortly after the eruption of the second permanent molars.