An easy way to protect your child’s teeth.

When a child visits the dentist, every parent wants to hear the same thing: “No cavities.” Regular brushing helps prevent cavities, but there’s another tool that’s often underused: dental sealants.

What are dental sealants and how do they work?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are painted onto the chewing surfaces of your child’s back teeth (molars), where most tooth decay starts. As molars develop, pits and grooves form on top. Food and germs get caught in these spaces, which toothbrushes can’t easily reach. The result is decay and cavities.

With dental sealants, your dentist covers the molars with a protective coating, preventing the germs that cause cavities. Applying sealants is fast, easy and painless, and they produce a smooth surface that can be easily brushed and will last for years.

In brief:

• Sealants are one of the best ways to help children avoid tooth decay
• Sealants are safe, easy and cause no pain or discomfort when applied
• Depending on your benefit program, sealants are usually covered as a preventive service
Applying sealants is fast and painless for your child:

1. First the dentist or dental hygienist rubs the tooth surfaces with a conditioning solution.
2. After a minute, the solution is washed off and the teeth are dried with air.
3. The sealant is then painted on the chewing surface of each molar.

The sealant will bond to the tooth and harden into a protective shield. Applying sealants usually takes five minutes or less per tooth. Once the sealants harden, your child can eat and drink normally.

How much do sealants cost?

Depending on your benefit program, sealants are usually covered as a preventive service. Preventive services typically require little or no out-of-pocket payment. Sealants are also likely to save you time and money in the future, as they help prevent the decay that can lead to cavities and fillings. You'll save on costly dentist bills, and your child will enjoy the benefits of having strong, healthy teeth.

How and when are sealants applied?

Sealants should be applied twice: once when your child gets their first permanent molars, at age six or seven, and again when their second set of molars comes in, at about age 11 or 12.