

**Discuss dental sealants with your child's dentist**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Protective dental sealants can prevent much of the tooth decay that children experience. During February, National Children's Dental Health Month, dental organizations in Alabama are urging parents to discuss sealants with their children's dentists. The most recent dental survey of Alabama school children, conducted in 1990-91, found that 39 percent had one or more cavities.

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of the molars (back teeth). Most tooth decay in children and teens occurs in these surfaces. Sealants cover the chewing surfaces to prevent decay.

While brushing and flossing help remove food particles and plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth, toothbrush bristles cannot reach all the way into the depressions and grooves. Sealants protect these vulnerable areas.

Permanent molars are the most likely to benefit from sealant application. First molars usually come into the mouth when a child is about 6 years of age. Second molars appear at about age 12. It is best if the sealant is applied soon after the molars have erupted, before the teeth have a chance to decay. For that reason, children between the ages of 5 and 15 benefit most from sealants.

Applying sealants does not require drilling or removing tooth structure. It is an easy, three-step process: A dentist or dental hygienist cleans the tooth with a special toothpaste. A special cleansing liquid is rubbed gently on the tooth and is washed off. Finally, the sealant is painted on the tooth. It takes about a minute for the sealant to form a protective shield.

Dr. Stuart Lockwood, state dental director, Oral Health Branch, Alabama Department of Public Health, said, "Ask your dentist whether your child will benefit from the placement of dental sealants. Up to 90 percent of all tooth decay in school children is found on the part of the molar teeth that sealants can prevent."

Sealants recently have been estimated to be 60 percent effective in preventing decay on these teeth surfaces, according to the Centers for Disease and Prevention. Nationally, and statewide, about 25 percent of third graders were found to have sealants, but among low-income students nationally and in Alabama less than 3 percent of these children had a sealant.

Organizations endorsing the use of dental sealants include: Alabama Dental Association, Alabama Dental Society, Alabama Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Alabama Academy of General Dentistry, University of Alabama School of Dentistry and Alabama Department of Public Health.

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