Fissure Sealants: What They Are and Why | Core Dental

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Details:

Fissure sealants, also called fissure seals, are a thin protective coating painted onto the natural grooves (fissures) on the biting surfaces of back teeth. Deep, narrow grooves are hard to clean with a toothbrush, so plaque can build up and lead to decay. A sealant smooths and covers the groove, making it easier to keep clean. At Core Dental our dentists may recommend sealants for children, teenagers and some adults, depending on risk.

What are fissures?

Fissures are natural grooves that form during tooth development. They are usually on the biting surfaces of molars and premolars (the back teeth), although they can also appear on canines and incisors. They can range from wide and shallow to narrow and deep.

Why are narrow, deep fissures a problem?

Toothbrush bristles often cannot fit into narrow, deep grooves, so trapped food particles and bacteria are hard to remove. When bacteria build up they form plaque, which releases acid byproducts. Over time that acid can eat into the tooth structure and cause decay. Fissures are one of the places where decay commonly starts, especially soon after a child's permanent teeth come through.

Who might a dentist recommend fissure sealants for?

Your dentist may recommend sealants if your fissures are at increased risk of plaque build-up. They are often suggested for children and teenagers who have recently developed permanent molars or premolars and find it hard to keep the biting surfaces free from plaque and bacteria. Some adults with deep grooves may also benefit. Whether sealants suit you or your child depends on an examination, and not every tooth needs one. Eligible children may be able to have dental care bulk billed under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, and we can check this when you book.

What are fissure sealants made from?

Fissure sealants are made from synthetic polymers or from glass ionomer cements. They can be clear, tinted or white. Your dentist will choose a material to suit the tooth and the situation, and will ask about any allergies.

How are fissure sealants applied?

Placing a sealant is usually quick and does not involve drilling or injections. The steps are generally:

The tooth is cleaned and dried. A dental dam or cotton rolls may be used to keep it dry. Read about the dental dam .

The surface is prepared so the sealant can bond.

The sealant is applied as a thin liquid layer over the grooves.

It sets naturally after a few minutes, or more quickly when a curing light is used.

The result is a flat protective coating that smooths out the grooves and makes them easier to clean. This can reduce the risk of decay in the treated areas. It does not remove the risk of decay elsewhere in the mouth.

How long do fissure sealants last?

Sealants can last for years, but they can wear, chip or come away, particularly with heavy chewing or if the tooth was not kept dry during placement. We check them at your regular check-ups and can repair or replace a sealant if needed. Read more in how long dental sealants last .

How can you look after sealed teeth?

Sealants work alongside good home care. Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, clean between teeth daily, limit sugary snacks and drinks, and attend regular check-ups and cleans. Avoid biting very hard or sticky foods on sealed teeth if your dentist suggests it.

What a fissure sealant is, and which teeth get one

A sealant is one of the few dental treatments that is purely preventive — it is applied to a tooth that is not damaged, to stop it becoming damaged. The published description is short enough to quote almost in full, and the details matter.

The Victorian Department of Health: "A sealant is painted on to the biting surface of a cleaned tooth, and sets as a durable plastic material. It creates a barrier that stops food and other bacteria from collecting in the grooves of the tooth and causing decay."

Three things worth drawing out of that sentence.

It goes on the biting surface. Not around the tooth, not between teeth — on the surface you chew with, which is where the grooves are.

It is a plastic material that sets hard. The Department calls it "a durable plastic material", applied as a liquid and set in place. Nothing is drilled, because there is nothing to remove.

Its job is to deny shelter, not to kill bacteria. The barrier "stops food and other bacteria from collecting in the grooves". The mechanism is mechanical — it fills in the hiding places.

Which teeth? The Department's answer has a general rule and a usual practice: "Any tooth that has deep grooves or fissures can be treated, but fissure sealants are usually placed on molars and premolars rather than front teeth."

The reason front teeth are usually left out follows from the mechanism. A sealant protects grooves, and front teeth do not have the deep pits and fissures that back teeth do. So this is not a judgement that front teeth matter less — it is that there is nothing there for a sealant to fill.

And who they are recommended for: "Fissure sealants are often recommended for children, as they reduce the risk of decay in permanent teeth."

Note permanent teeth. The reasoning connects to how teeth arrive: a child's permanent molars come through long before adulthood and then have to last a lifetime, and the grooves are deepest and the cleaning habits least reliable in exactly those early years. The Department states the benefit as reducing risk — not eliminating it, which is the subject of the next section.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Teeth development in children, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 16 August 2023). Both accessed 5 November 2026.

Why a sealed tooth still needs everything else

The risk with any protective treatment is that it is heard as a solution. A sealant covers one surface of one tooth, and the published advice is clear about what it does not reach.

It does not cover where decay most often hides. The Department, on why imaging is needed at a check-up, gives this example: "possible decay between two touching teeth". That is the contact surface between neighbours — not the biting surface, and therefore not where the sealant is. A sealed molar can still decay on the side facing the tooth next to it.

It does not change the daily routine. The Department's prevention list for avoiding fillings stands regardless: "brushing your teeth twice a day"; "using fluoride toothpaste"; "enjoying a wide variety of nutritious foods"; "choosing tap water over sugary drinks". A sealant is in addition to those, not instead of them.

It does not remove the reason for check-ups. Two published statements make this point from different directions. The first is about how much tooth is at stake: "An intact tooth is stronger than a filled one, so it's important to try and avoid fillings due to tooth decay." The second is about timing: "Finding decay in the early stages means less of your tooth needs to be repaired in the process of getting a filling."

Those apply to a sealed tooth as much as an unsealed one — and a sealant is itself something to keep an eye on, since the barrier only works while it is intact.

On when to start , the published advice gives a first appointment rather than a sealant age: "Children should have their first dental check-up by 1 year of age", and for everyone after that, "ask your dental practitioner how often you should have a dental check-up". Whether and when a particular tooth should be sealed depends on that tooth having erupted and having the kind of grooves worth sealing, which is something to be looked at rather than scheduled from a web page.

The honest summary , then. The Department's claim for sealants is that they "reduce the risk of decay in permanent teeth". Reduce, on the surface they cover. They are a good deal: nothing is drilled, because a sealant goes onto a sound tooth rather than a damaged one, and they are one layer of several. If your child has sealants and has stopped flossing, the sealants are not the thing that will keep the gaps between those molars healthy.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Dental fillings, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025). Both accessed 5 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Do fissure sealants hurt?

Placing a sealant is usually painless. It generally does not need drilling or injections, and children usually find it comfortable. Tell us if your child feels worried and we will go at their pace.

At what age can children have fissure sealants?

Sealants are usually suggested once permanent molars and premolars have come through. Your dentist will look at your child's teeth and recommend a time.

Are fissure sealants safe?

Dental sealants have been used for many years and are generally considered safe. Tell your dentist about any allergies and your dentist will explain any risks for your situation.

Can a tooth with a sealant still decay?

Yes. A sealant protects the grooves it covers, but decay can still develop elsewhere or under a worn sealant. Regular brushing, cleaning between teeth and check-ups remain important.

Can adults have fissure sealants?

Some adults with deep grooves and an increased chance of decay may benefit. Your dentist will assess your teeth and talk about options.

Which teeth are usually sealed, and why not front teeth?

Back teeth. The Victorian Department of Health states that "any tooth that has deep grooves or fissures can be treated, but fissure sealants are usually placed on molars and premolars rather than front teeth". It follows from how a sealant works: it fills in grooves, and front teeth do not have the deep pits and fissures that back teeth do.

What is a sealant actually made of?

A plastic that sets hard. The published description is that "a sealant is painted on to the biting surface of a cleaned tooth, and sets as a durable plastic material". It is applied as a liquid, so nothing needs to be drilled away first.

Does a sealant protect the sides of the tooth?

No — only the surface it covers. A sealant goes on "the biting surface", while one of the commonest places for decay is, in the Department's own example, "between two touching teeth". That contact surface is not sealed, which is why cleaning between the teeth still matters on a sealed tooth.

Is a sealant an alternative to a filling?

No, they do different jobs at different stages. A sealant is applied to a sound tooth to stop decay starting; a filling treats "tooth decay that has caused a cavity (hole)". The Department's claim for sealants is that they "reduce the risk of decay in permanent teeth" — a reduction in risk, not a guarantee.

Does having sealants change how often my child needs check-ups?

The published advice gives no reduced schedule, and a sealant is itself something to keep an eye on, since the barrier only works while it is intact. The Department's guidance is that children should have a first check-up "by 1 year of age" and otherwise to "ask your dental practitioner how often you should have a dental check-up".

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Children's dentistry

Dental sealants: how long do they last?

What is a dental dam?

Top tips for children's dental hygiene

Dental check-ups

Bulk billed dental care and the Child Dental Benefits Schedule

Snacks that help prevent tooth decay

How can we help?

If you would like to find out whether sealants suit you or your child, our team can examine the teeth at any of our nine clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online, and we will talk you through the options and fees before treatment starts.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for adults and parents or carers. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What are fissure sealants?

Fissure sealants, also called fissure seals, are a thin protective coating applied to the grooves on the biting surfaces of back teeth to help protect them from plaque and decay. Core Dental dentists assess which teeth may benefit.

Where do fissures form on teeth?

Fissures form during tooth development, usually on the biting surfaces of molars and premolars, and sometimes on canines and incisors. Core Dental dentists examine these grooves at check-ups.

What materials are used for fissure sealants?

Fissure sealants are made from synthetic polymers or glass ionomer cements and can be clear, tinted or white. Your Core Dental dentist will choose a material to suit the tooth.

How is a fissure sealant applied?

The tooth is cleaned and dried, the sealant is applied as a thin liquid and it sets naturally in a few minutes or faster under a curing light. Core Dental dentists usually need no drilling or injections.

Who may need fissure sealants?

A dentist may recommend sealants for children and teenagers with newly erupted permanent molars or premolars, or for people with deep grooves that are hard to clean. Core Dental dentists decide after an examination.

Can fissure sealants be bulk billed for children?

Some children's dental care may be bulk billed for eligible children under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, and Core Dental can check eligibility when you book. Ask which services are covered for your child.

How do I book fissure sealants at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au at any of our nine clinics. Our team will arrange an examination, and your dentist will explain whether sealants suit you and what they will cost.