

Preventing tooth decay can become even easier. You may already be aware that daily brushing and flossing are the most important weapons against the formation of plaque, the primary cause of cavities. In addition to your regular routine of brushing and flossing, your dentist can apply a coat of plastic material – called a sealant – on the top or biting surfaces of your back teeth. This plastic coating creates a barrier on your teeth and seals out the decay-causing bacteria that live in plaque.

### **What is plaque and why does it cause cavities?**

The food and liquids you eat and drink combine with bacteria to produce a sticky film called plaque. Plaque attaches on and in between teeth, where it starts to eat away at the tooth enamel. If plaque is not removed regularly by brushing and flossing your teeth, it can produce acids that will create pits or holes (cavities) in the tooth. This is tooth decay.

### **How can sealants help prevent cavities?**

Applying a thin plastic coating to your teeth makes it harder for the plaque to stick to the tiny grooves on the biting surfaces of the back teeth - protecting the tooth surface and reducing the risk of forming cavities.

### **Is it difficult to apply sealants?**

No. Sealant placement is quick, simple and painless. Most often, sealants will last for several years. At regular check-up visits, your CDA member dentist or dental hygienist will check to see that sealants are still in place.

### **Who should get sealants?**

Sealants are most effective in reducing cavities in children with newly formed permanent teeth. In fact, all children should have their molars (back teeth) evaluated for sealants soon after they erupt. For most children, this occurs approximately at ages 6 and 12.

Sealants can also be useful in cutting down formation of decay in adult teeth, as well. An application of sealants is a preventative measure to keep teeth healthy. It is an effective way to reduce the need for fillings and more expensive treatments that may be required to repair the damage from cavities, so sealants can save you money.

Ask your CDA member dentist whether sealants would be an appropriate treatment for you and your children to help prevent tooth decay.