

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Sealants Help Prevent Tooth Decay**

If you're a parent, you probably care for your children's teeth by making sure they brush and get regular checkups. But, dentists advise that you also should have dental sealants applied to your children's teeth.

"Every child who might get cavities needs dental sealants," said Diane Cusworth of the Otsego County Department of Health. "Sealants help prevent tooth decay."

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children ages 2 to 11 in the United States -- five times more common than asthma, Diane Cusworth said. But most cavities are preventable. For this reason dental sealant programs have been placed in many of New York's schools. If your children's school does not have a program, talk to your dentist or dental hygienist about how you can have your children's teeth sealed. If you do not have a dentist, contact your school nurse, community health center or local health department.

Healthy teeth are an important part of overall good health and self-image at any age. The Otsego County Department of Health reminds parents that:

- Poor dental health can affect not only children's appearance and self-esteem, but also their ability to properly chew and digest food.
- Untreated cavities can be painful, lead to serious infections and affect a child's readiness to learn and ability to experience normal childhood activities.
- Poor oral health has also been linked to sleeping, behavioral and developmental problems in children.

Sealants have been used since the 1970s. A sealant is soft, thin, plastic material that is placed on the chewing surfaces of permanent back teeth, or molars. Sealants protect teeth from decay by filling in pits and grooves where food can get stuck and

cavities form. According to the New York State Department of Health, properly applied sealants are extremely effective in protecting tooth surfaces from cavities.

Sealants are easy to apply and do not hurt. No drilling is done. After your children's teeth are brushed or polished, sealants are placed on the teeth and then dried. A dentist or dental hygienist can easily apply sealants to your children's molars beginning when your children are around age six or seven. The dentist or dental hygienist and you will decide if your children need sealants.

Even children who get topical fluoride, or children who drink water with fluoride may need sealants. Fluorides are used to give the best protection to places where teeth are smooth. However, permanent back teeth (molars) are rougher. These teeth need sealants for more protection. Both fluoride and sealants protect teeth from plaque and acid, substances that cause cavities.

To be sure your children's teeth are fully protected, you should make sure that they get enough fluoride, brush and floss regularly, limit sweets and soda, and get dental checkups.

To learn more about dental sealants, call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230 or visit the State Health Department web site at [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov).