

Consumer Handout | Canberra Health Services

Preventive dental treatments for children

Preventive dental treatments are services designed to help maintain oral health and prevent future dental problems. Preventive dental treatments include fluoride varnish, scale and clean, and fissure sealants. Depending on your individual need, your dental professional may recommend one, or several, preventive dental treatment option/s.

Fluoride varnish

What is fluoride varnish?

Fluoride varnish is a concentrated form of fluoride which is applied to the tooth enamel (outer layer of the tooth). It works by strengthening the tooth enamel to help protect it from tooth decay. Long term effectiveness depends on the varnish used, and your oral hygiene and dietary habits.

How is fluoride varnish applied?

First, the teeth are dried with air or cotton rolls. Then a small amount of fluoride varnish is applied to the teeth with a small brush or applicator. Once applied, the fluoride varnish is sticky but hardens on contact with saliva within a few minutes. The varnish will wear off on its own. For best results, we recommend you don't eat or drink for 30 minutes, and no brushing for 4-6 hours after the fluoride varnish has been applied.

What are the risks of fluoride varnish?

Allergic reactions to fluoride varnish are rare but possible. In extreme cases, you may have trouble breathing. If you experience difficulty breathing, please call 000. If you have a mild reaction, such as inflammation of the gum, you can brush the teeth and rinse the mouth to remove the fluoride varnish.

Let your dental professional know if your child has:

- hypersensitivity or allergy to colophony (natural resin) or milk protein so they can use a different type of fluoride varnish,
- asthma, or
- mouth ulcers or sores in the mouth (we may need to delay fluoride varnish application).

Fissure sealants

What are fissure sealants?

A fissure is a natural groove on the biting/chewing surface of a back tooth. These fissures can be deep and narrow. This makes it hard for toothbrush bristles to get in and clean it. The tooth may also be hard to reach and clean. Because of this, tooth decay can start in these fissures.

A fissure sealant is a safe way of helping protect the tooth from decay. The fissure sealant covers the fissures to help stop food and bacteria getting stuck. The sealant contains fluoride, which gives you extra protection against tooth decay. The sealant is usually placed on the biting surface of adult back teeth. Sealants can also be placed on other adult teeth or baby teeth. Your dental professional will decide which teeth need to be sealed. Sealants are not permanent and may need replacement.



Fissure sealants on back teeth

How are fissure sealants applied?

Fissure sealants are simple to apply. No drilling is needed. We may take an x-ray to make sure the teeth don't have any decay. It usually takes about 5 minutes per tooth and is painless.

1. The tooth is cleaned with a brush.
2. A cleaning solution is put on the tooth and then washed off.
3. The tooth will be kept dry so the sealant can stick to the tooth properly.
4. The liquid sealant is applied to the tooth with a small brush or applicator. The liquid sealant flows into the fissures of the tooth and may be set hard with a special light. This leaves a thin layer of white material in the fissure.
5. Your dental professional will check the sealant does not interfere with the way your teeth bite together. The sealant may feel unfamiliar at first, even when it is checked.

What are the risks of fissure sealants?

On rare occasions side-effects may occur, including irritation of the gums, cheeks or tongue. If this occurs, it should resolve within a few days. If you have any concerns, speak to your dental professional – CHI: (02) 5124 9977.



Teeth cleaning (prophylaxis and dental scaling)

What is teeth cleaning (prophylaxis and dental scaling)?

Sometimes plaque, calculus (hardened plaque) or stains can build up on your teeth and can't be removed by toothbrushing at home. We may use a professional electric toothbrush and cleaning paste to clean away any plaque and stains from the surface of your tooth. This is called dental prophylaxis. Dental scaling is when we use a small instrument to gently lift away any calculus (hardened plaque) that may have collected on the surface of your teeth.

What are the risks of teeth cleaning?

Risks with teeth cleaning are minimal. As plaque and calculus can irritate your gums, you may have sensitive teeth or bleeding gums following a dental clean. Bleeding often settles quickly and sensitivity generally goes away within two days. Let us know if your doctor has told you that your child needs antibiotics before dental treatment, we may need to delay the clean.



Acknowledgement of Country

Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this region.



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Interpreter: call 131 450 canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au/accessibility



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