

Dental Amalgam

Information for Parents or Carers of
Patients Under 15 Years Old

What is dental amalgam?

Dental amalgam is the silver coloured material that is commonly used to fill teeth that have decay. Amalgam is a mixture of mercury and other metals in a stable form and makes strong, long-lasting fillings.

Dental amalgam fillings have been used to restore decayed teeth for more than 150 years. There is no evidence that amalgam fillings cause any harm to the health of dental patients, including children.

Why have I been given this information?

New regulations in the UK and the European Union (EU) that restrict the use of mercury came into law in 2018. The regulations are part of a worldwide agreement to reduce global environmental pollution caused by mercury. This includes mercury released during the production, use and disposal of mercury products, such as dental amalgam.

According to the new regulations, the use of dental amalgam is no longer allowed for the treatment of children under 15 years old, unless the dentist thinks that it is necessary. These restrictions on the use of dental amalgam aim to help reduce environmental mercury pollution and are not a result of any safety concerns about amalgam fillings for dental patients.

Because your child is under 15 years old, the new regulations apply to them. This means that, to reduce dental amalgam use, your dentist* should not use amalgam fillings in your child's first teeth (baby or milk teeth) and will not usually use amalgam to fill their adult teeth.

* In this leaflet, by dentist we also mean dental therapist.



What are the alternatives?

The best way to avoid the need for amalgam fillings is to prevent tooth decay in the first place. Toothbrushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and following healthy eating advice can help to prevent tooth decay. Other treatments such as fluoride varnish and sealants can be used to prevent or stop decay in the early stages. If your child does need a filling, there are materials other than dental amalgam that your dentist can use in most cases. These include tooth-coloured fillings or preformed (stainless steel) crowns.

My dentist has advised that my child should have an amalgam filling. Why is this?

It is generally agreed that in some situations dental amalgam is the only suitable material, despite the environmental concerns. Therefore, your dentist might advise that an amalgam filling is necessary for your child and will explain the reasons for this.

What about the amalgam fillings my child already has?

There is no evidence to suggest that existing amalgam fillings are harmful to the health of dental patients. Unless your child's amalgam fillings are broken or there is further decay, there is no need to have them removed or replaced.

If you would like further information or have any concerns, please speak to your child's dentist.