

Frequently Asked Questions:

Amalgams (silver-colored fillings) vs. Composites (tooth-colored fillings)

Does Delta Dental cover posterior composites (tooth-colored fillings on back teeth)?

Yes (for Delta Dental PPO and Delta Dental Premier programs; DeltaCare programs do not currently cover posterior composites). Effective November 1, 2008, posterior composite coverage is standard in all of our benefit offerings. Posterior composite coverage will be effective at renewal for existing groups with more than 50 enrollees beginning February 1, 2009. Groups with renewal dates prior to February 1, 2009 can elect to add this coverage by notifying their account executive. Posterior composite coverage is effective for pooled groups (groups with two to 49 enrollees) November 1, 2008.

Why is Delta Dental of Illinois adding coverage of posterior composites as a standard benefit offering?

Many enrollees want the cosmetic benefit of posterior composites over amalgams because they are tooth-colored and blend in with natural teeth. Additionally, a recent report from the National Association of Dental Plans showed that fewer dentists are doing amalgams (silver-colored fillings). As a result of enrollee feedback and dental industry data, Delta Dental of Illinois decided to make posterior composite coverage a standard benefit in all of our dental benefit plans.

What is the benefit level for posterior composites?

Posterior composites will generally be included in Coverage B (we will match existing or requested plan designs) at the level dictated by a group's specific plan design.

What fillings are standard? If the use of amalgam is declining, why is it still considered standard?

The ADA states that there are a variety of dental filling materials that would be appropriate for a dentist to use, depending on the situation with a particular patient. The treating dentist is free to exercise his or her professional judgment and choose the most appropriate filling material for each unique situation.

A July 2008 report from the National Association of Dental Plans confirmed that the use of amalgam for restorations is declining, and that there has been a significant increase in the use of composites on the posterior teeth over the last several years.

The ADA has published information that attributes the declining use of amalgam to a variety of factors, including better access to dental care, fluoridated water, better oral hygiene practices and increasing use of sealants.

Even though more patients and dentists are choosing to use tooth-colored filling materials, the ADA still supports the use of dental amalgam as a safe, affordable and durable material. In its *Statement on Dental Amalgam*, the ADA notes that dental amalgam has been studied and reviewed extensively, and that it has established a record of safety and effectiveness. The ADA continues to believe that amalgam is a valuable, viable and safe choice for dental patients and concurs with the findings of the U.S. Public Health Service that amalgam has "continuing value in maintaining oral health."

Are amalgam fillings still covered?

Yes.

(continued...)

Are there any adverse health effects from using amalgam?

While questions have been raised concerning the safety of amalgam fillings, no public agency has found evidence to support discontinuation of the material and the FDA places no restrictions on their use.

From the American Dental Association: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other public health organizations have investigated the safety of dental amalgams and concluded that “no valid scientific evidence has shown that amalgams cause harm to patients with dental restorations, except in rare cases of allergy.” The World Health Organization (WHO) reached a similar conclusion, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) maintains that “at present, there is scant evidence that the health of the vast majority of people with amalgam is compromised, nor that removing amalgam fillings has a beneficial effect on health.”

Can enrollees replace their old amalgam fillings with composite fillings?

The Food and Drug Administration does not recommend patients have amalgam fillings removed since this could cause harm to the tooth structure and pose other health risks to the patient.