



Health and  
Social Care

## Dental Amalgam - Information for:

- **Patients under 15 Years Old; and parents / guardians / carers**
- **Pregnant or Breastfeeding Patients**

### **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 and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

### **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 to be restricted for the treatment of children under 15 years old and of pregnant or breastfeeding women, unless the dentist\* thinks that it is necessary. This means that your dentist\* will not usually use dental amalgam to fill your teeth. 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.

\* 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. Alternative materials are suitable for use in other types of filling.

## **Children under 15 years old**

If a child under 15 years old does need a filling your dentist\* can use other materials including tooth-coloured fillings or preformed (stainless steel) crowns. 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 in the best interest of your child and will explain the reasons for this.

## **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

While you are pregnant your dentist\* will advise postponing any treatment unless it is urgent, for example, if you are in pain. It is generally accepted that pregnant women should avoid any unnecessary medical or dental treatment to minimise any possible risks to the developing baby unless it is really urgent. If you need a filling when pregnant or breastfeeding, there are materials other than dental amalgam that your dentist\* can use in the interim until the full range of treatments are available. He/she will discuss the amalgam alternatives with you to agree on the best option.

## **What about the amalgam fillings I already have?**

If you already have amalgam fillings, there is no evidence to suggest that these are harmful to dental patients; or indeed indirectly to a baby's or infant's health. Unless your amalgam fillings are broken or there is further decay, and urgent treatment is required, your dentist\* will not remove or replace them.

**If you would like further information or have any concerns, please speak to your dentist\*.**