

Promoting child oral health

Tooth decay is the most common oral disease affecting children and young people in England, yet it is largely preventable.

Although oral health is improving in England, the oral health survey of 5 year olds in 2017 showed that just under a quarter have tooth decay (PHE National Dental Epidemiology Programme for England, 2017). Each child with tooth decay will have on average 3 to 4 teeth affected. For those children at risk, tooth decay starts early. The first survey of 3 year olds in 2014 found that 12% had visible tooth decay, with on average 3 teeth affected.

While 77% of 5 year old children in England are now free of obvious tooth decay, significant regional inequalities remain - with children from the most deprived areas having more than twice the level of decay, than those from the least deprived.

Almost 9 out of 10 hospital tooth extractions among children aged 0 to 5 years are due to preventable tooth decay and tooth extraction is still the most common hospital procedure in 6 to 10 year olds, according to PHE data up to 2019.

Improving the oral health of children is a Public Health England (PHE) priority - PHE has an ambition that every child will grow up free of tooth decay, to help give them the best start in life.

PHE has established a Child Oral Health Improvement Programme Board (COHIPB) working with a range of partners and stakeholders, to improve the health of all children, and reduce the oral health gap for disadvantaged children.

Oral health is part of general health and wellbeing, and contributes to the development of a healthy child as well as school readiness.

Research about extractions in children in North West hospitals found that **26%** had missed days from school because of dental pain and infection



An average of **3 days** of school were missed due to dental problems



67% of parents reported their child had been in pain



38% of children had sleepless nights because of the pain



Many days of work were potentially lost as **41%** of parents/carers were employed

Tooth decay can cause problems with eating, sleeping, communication and socialising, and results in at least 60,000 days being missed by children during the school year for hospital extractions alone.

Tooth decay could be prevented by cutting down on sugar, as well as brushing teeth with fluoride toothpaste. The cost to the NHS of treating oral conditions is about £3.4 billion per year.

Regularly consuming food and drinks high in sugar increases the risk of tooth decay, and can lead to an increased risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Children are still consuming more than the recommended daily limit.



Top 3 interventions for preventing tooth decay

- 1** 
Reduce the consumption of foods and drinks that contain sugars
- 2** 
Brush teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste (1350-1500ppm), last thing at night and at least on one other occasion. After brushing, spit don't rinse
- 3** 
Take your child to the dentist when the first tooth erupts, at about 6 months and then on a regular basis

Under 3s should use a smear of toothpaste 

3 to 6 year olds should use a pea sized amount 

Parents/carers should brush or supervise tooth brushing until their **child is at least 7**

Public Health England

Child oral health: applying All Our Health

Updated 28 August 2019

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health#core-principles-for-health-and-care-professionals>