

How health visitors can help to give every child a smile for life

Despite being a preventable disease, almost a quarter of 5 year olds¹ and 12% of 3 year olds² have experienced tooth decay, and extraction of decayed teeth remains the most common reason for hospital admissions in 5-9 year olds in England. Figures published in April 2018 by Public Health England³ (PHE) show around 141 children per day, some just a year old, are having teeth removed. Mindful not only of the risk of pain and infection, but also of the wider impact of poor oral health on children's development, nutrition, speech, social interactions and confidence, dental teams can work together with early-years healthcare professionals to support a reduction in the large number of children having decayed teeth extracted under general anaesthesia.⁴



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¹ Oral health survey of 5-year-old children 2017, Public Health England

² Oral health survey of 3-year-old children 2013, Public Health England

³ Data on tooth extractions taken from PHE's Hospital Extraction Episodes published at:

<http://www.nwph.net/dentalhealth/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-child-dental-health/health-matters-child-dental-health>

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What can health visitors do to promote good oral health for children?

1. Encourage a Dental Check by One

The all-important first dental visit by a child's first birthday - Dental Check by One⁵ – as called for by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry, gives children the opportunity to develop a positive lifelong relationship with a dental team, who can support families and carers with oral health advice, address any concerns, and nurture a whole range of healthy behaviours. Regular dental attendance and ongoing preventive care delivered by the dental team will contribute to a child's best start in life.

For more information on the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry's Dental Check by One campaign and related resources, please visit the following links:

<http://bspd.co.uk/Patients/Dental-Check-by-One>

NHS dentistry is free for children under 18, or under 19 and in full-time education, pregnant women and for women who have had a baby in the past 12 months. For further information about who is entitled to free NHS dental care in England, please visit the following links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1786.aspx?CategoryID=74>

<https://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/are-pregnant-women-entitled-to-free-NHS-dental-treatment.aspx>

2. Offer simple evidence-based oral health advice to families and carers

The work of health visitors is key to promoting the best start in life for every child, and oral health is very much part of this. Health visitors can support families and carers with simple effective oral health advice, including information on toothbrushing, feeding, weaning, diet and signposting to dental services.

⁵ Dental Check by One is a campaign led by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry <http://bspd.co.uk/Patients/Dental-Check-by-One>

For more information about how and when health visitors can support families and carers with oral health advice, please follow the link to PHE guidance **‘Improving oral health for children and young people** for health visitors, school nurses and practice nurses’
<https://vivbennett.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/90/2016/11/Improving-oral-health-for-children.pdf>

TOP TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUNG CHILDREN’S TEETH (aged 0-3 years)

- As soon as teeth erupt in a baby’s mouth, parents/carers should brush them twice daily - last thing at night and on one other occasion.
- When toothbrushing, use a smear of toothpaste containing no less than 1,000 ppm fluoride for children aged 0-3 years.
- Take a baby for their first dental check as soon as the first tooth comes through, and certainly by the age of one. Ongoing regular dental attendance is important thereafter, and the dentist can advise how often the baby should attend.
- From six months of age, infants should be introduced to drinking from a free flow cup.
- From age one year, bottle feeding should be discouraged.
- Only put un-sweetened milk or plain water in feeding bottles.
- Don’t leave babies or toddlers with a feeding bottle or trainer cup in their mouth for long periods of time, such as when they go to bed
- Don’t dip a bottle, pacifier or dummy in anything sweet.
- Sugar should not be added to weaning foods or drinks.
- Reduce the frequency and amount of sugary food and drinks – avoid sugary snacks.
- From the age of one, avoid all food and drinks except water in the hour before bed.
- Wherever possible, children should take sugar-free medicines

Top tips based on guidance published by PHE (Delivering Better Oral Health) and the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry’s ‘A practical guide to children’s teeth’, as found at following links:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention>
<http://bspd.co.uk/Portals/0/A%20practical%20guide%20to%20children's%20teeth%20Nov%202016.pdf>

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3. Offer supportive resources to families and carers

A variety of free resources for families and carers, including Apps, websites and downloadable materials, are available to reinforce oral health advice and support families adopt healthier diets and effective toothbrushing. Health visitors may wish to raise awareness or encourage the use of such resources amongst families and carers.

iHV will be promoting examples of resources for families and carers via our Facebook and Twitter feeds throughout August – keep an eye out for suggested resources

4. Consider higher risk children and those with additional care needs

Health visitors may be able to identify young children who may be at high risk of tooth decay due to a range of social and lifestyle factors. Children whose siblings have a history of tooth decay may also be more likely to develop poor oral health.

Health visitors also may be aware of health conditions or developmental issues presenting in early childhood, which may indicate additional and potentially complex healthcare needs for children, for example long term medication or hospital care. In some of these cases, this may impact on young children's oral health and dental care, and families or carers may need to be made aware. For children with additional care or support needs, as well as encouraging a dental visit by the child's first birthday (Dental Check by One) and promoting evidence-based oral health advice, health visitors should consider the specific care and support required, and whether some families and carers may require referral or assistance to access general, community or specialist dental services, or local oral health programmes.

For more information about risk factors for poor oral health in children, please visit the following link to PHE's guidance **Child oral health: applying All Our Health:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health>

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5. Engage with local oral health stakeholders

Health visitors may wish to engage with local dental services and find out about local community oral health initiatives, via NHS England Local Dental Networks, local Consultants in Dental Public Health, or the Local Authority Public Health team. This may allow for:

- Collaborative oral health promotion work between health visitors and other stakeholders;
- Improved understanding of local dental care and referral pathways and general, community or specialist dental services;
- Explicit and meaningful signposting to named dental practices; and
- More help for children, families and carers to benefit from local oral health initiatives.

To find out how to get in touch with your Local Dental Network, please email england.CDOExecutive@nhs.net.

The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry is leading the Dental Check by One campaign, calling for all children to have their first dental check by their first birthday. The BSPD website hosts information and resources around child oral health which may be of use and interest to health visitors:

- Resources <http://bspd.co.uk/Resources>
- Dental Check by One information for professionals <http://bspd.co.uk/Resources/Dental-Check-by-One>
- Dental Check by One information for patients <http://bspd.co.uk/Patients/Dental-Check-by-One>
- Position statement on infant feeding (in relation to oral health and tooth decay) <http://bspd.co.uk/Resources/Position-Statements>
- Videos - BBC Breakfast interviews with Chair of BSPD and Chief Dental Officer England, about child oral health <http://bspd.co.uk/News-Media/Videos>
- FAQs for patients and parents <http://bspd.co.uk/Patients>

CPD – have you seen, read or completed?

- Public Health England (PHE) resource including infographics outlining how health professionals can help prevent tooth decay in children under 5 years old as part of ensuring every child has the best start in life.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-child-dental-health/health-matters-child-dental-health>
- All Our Health child dental health - evidence and guidance to help healthcare professionals improve child oral health.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health/child-oral-health-applying-all-our-health>
- E-learning module '**Dental Health Promotion**'. Developed by Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health and Health Education England (HEE), update led by PHE. Hosted by HEE e-LfH
http://cs1.e-learningforhealthcare.org.uk/public/HCP/HCP_10_007/d/ELFH_Session/623/session.html?lms=n#overview.html
- A set of online Starting Well resources has been produced that is suitable for use by the wider Health and Social Care and Early Years workforce to support oral health promotion for children aged 0-2 years in non-dental settings. This includes posters, leaflets and other resources (e.g. Apps, videos, guidance) for the public, patients, parents and carers. Think how you might be able to use these with your colleagues within your local community to promote oral health. To access and download resources, please visit:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xguzitznvc0dde/AAao2_A-cRQfE6sPZF1V6m0a?dl=0