**Supporting information for Sheffield Early Years Oral Health Programme**

1. **Introduction**

Tooth decay remains a significant public health problem. In England, 25% of 5 year olds are affected, with the severity and burden on children being much greater in children living in deprived areas. Tooth decay impacts on children’s lives through pain, difficulty eating and sleeping with wider impacts on the family and school. Healthy Child Programmes are designed to improve the health of children, including their dental health.

1. **Tooth decay**

Tooth decay is caused when bacteria in the mouth feed on sugars from food and drink. The acid the bacteria produce causes damage to teeth leading to decay.

Tooth decay is largely preventable with children at risk of developing tooth decay if they have a poor diet, brush their teeth less than twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and are from deprived backgrounds.

**The importance of milk teeth**

Parents should be made aware of the importance of looking after primary (milk) teeth until they drop out (exfoliate) naturally. We know that tooth decay in primary teeth impacts on the lives of children and their families.

Diet and tooth brushing behaviours learnt as young children are often maintained throughout child- and adulthood so we want to encourage parents to give their children the best start in life by having healthy primary teeth as well as permanent teeth.

In addition, by the time the child has all of their primary teeth their permanent (adult) teeth are already beginning to form in the jaw. If a primary tooth is lost before the adult tooth is ready to appear in the mouth, the primary teeth on either side of the resulting gap will start to drift together, thus closing space. The space for the corresponding adult tooth will then be insufficient to allow it to move into its correct position; this could result in overcrowding of the adult teeth.

1. **Healthy eating for oral health**

Generally, tooth decay can be prevented by reducing the frequency of eating sugary foods and drinks – foods and drinks containing free sugars should be restricted to meal times only.

Sugars are found in lots of foods parents provide for children such as cakes, breakfast cereals, biscuits, jams, ketchup, baked beans, yoghurt and baby foods. It is important parents are encouraged to read the ingredients to see if foods contain sugar then to try and avoid regular consumption of those with high quantities of sugar. Snacks that are less likely to harm children’s teeth include: cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables.

Milk and plain water are the best drinks for teeth. For babies, breast-feeding is best. If bottle-feeding, bottles should only contain unsweetened milk or cooled boiled water. From the age of 6 months, parents should be encouraged to use a free-flow feeder cup (without a valve) containing milk or plain water. Parents should be warned of the dangers of putting fruit juice or sweetened drinks into feeding bottles or beakers for the child to sip regularly or use as a comforter, especially at bedtime. Such practices result in almost continuous bathing of the teeth with sugars and can lead to severe tooth decay. We know that families of certain cultures have traditions about babies and young children drinking sweetened tea in bottles and these behaviours are difficult to change.

**Dummies and bottles**

Children should be introduced to a free flow cup from 6 months of age instead of a bottle. The only drinks to be given in a bottle should be milk or water. Introducing free flow cups reduces the potential for young children to suck for long periods of time from bottles.

Dummies should never be dipped into sugary liquid, including honey and never be used as a permanent replacement for comfort, attention or feeding. Long term routine use of a dummy should be avoided as this can lead to speech development problems

1. **Tooth brushing**

Parents should start brushing their child’s teeth as soon as the first tooth appears. They should be advised to use a toothbrush with a small head containing soft bristles. Teeth should be brushed twice a day using fluoride toothpaste containing no less than 1000 parts per million (ppm) fluoride. Typically ‘family’ toothpastes contain 1450 ppm fluoride which can be used for the whole family including babies.

Use a smear of toothpaste for children under 3, a pea sized amount for children aged 3 +. Following tooth brushing children should be encouraged to spit out toothpaste but not to rinse.

Parents should supervise tooth brushing of their child’s teeth until they are at least 7 years old as younger children do not have sufficient manual dexterity to carry out a good tooth brushing technique.

Further advice to support parents with tooth brushing can be found at:

<http://www.child-smile.org.uk/parents-and-carers/toothbrushing/index.aspx>

4.1 Practical advice for parents

How to supervise tooth brushing changes as children grow and parents/carers need tailored advice at different stages:

**Stage 1 – baby**

At first the baby may find it a bit strange but will soon get used to the feeling of having their teeth brushed.

Parents/carers should:

* find a place that is comfortable and safe – it does not have to be the bathroom
* never leave a baby or small child alone with a toothbrush or toothpaste

How much toothpaste?

For children under three years of age use a **smear** of fluoride toothpaste on to a dry brush.



How to brush

Brushing someone else’s teeth can feel a little awkward at first for parents/carers - these tooth brushing positions can help:

* on your knee
* on a changing mat
* in a baby chair or high chair
* sitting in a pram or buggy
* in the bath.

When to brush

* pick a time that is convenient to parents
* think of the child’s usual day, perhaps at playtime or bath time
* eventually parents/carers can move on to a morning and night time routine.

**Stage 2 – toddler**

How much toothpaste?

For children aged three years and above, use a **pea-sized** amount of fluoride toothpaste.



When to brush

At home, children’s teeth should be brushed by a parent/carer last thing at night before bed time and on at least one other occasion.

As more teeth come through, it is important to develop a system of brushing that ensures that all surfaces of the teeth are brushed thoroughly each time.

How to brush

Toddlers may go through phases of not wanting their parent/carers to brush their teeth. While this can make it difficult for parents/carers and it is important they continue brushing the child’s teeth themselves as children of this age are not able to brush properly themselves.

**Stage 3 – pre school**



Parents/carers should assist with tooth brushing until about seven years of age when their child’s be able to brush themselves.

Pre-school children should be encouraged to do some of the brushing themselves so that they develop tooth brushing skills.

How much toothpaste?

For children aged three years and above, use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.

When to brush

At home, children’s teeth should be brushed last thing at night before bed time and on at least one other occasion.

**Baby teeth health teeth resource packs**

Health visitors are provided with dental packs to be given out to all children during their development check at the age of 1 year old and to children aged 2 years living in the 20% most deprived areas within the city. The packs contain a toothbrush, a tube of fluoride toothpaste containing 1450ppm of fluoride and an information leaflet; there is an addition of a free flow cup in the packs for the 1 year old.

1. **Teething**

Teething generally starts from the age of 6 months. Children will have all of their primary (milk) teeth by the time they are 3 years old and should have 20 teeth. The front 8 teeth (incisors) arrive first, followed by the first molars (first double teeth), canines (pointy teeth), and finally the second molars (very back teeth) at 2.5-3 years.

Signs of teething may include: dribbling more than usual, difficulty sleeping, chewing or biting hard surfaces, flushed cheeks and restlessness. These signs are common in babies and young children due to illness and parents may dismiss these signs as teething without seeking medical help.

Advice to give parents about teething:

* Give the baby something to chew on, like a teething ring although this only provides short term relief. Avoid giving rusks as they are high in sugar.
* Teething gels can help to numb the pain although again they only provide short term relief. Parents should check with a pharmacist before buying a teething gel to make sure it is suitable for their child.
* Painkilling medicine. If a baby is in pain or has a raised temperature, they can be given paracetamol or ibuprofen (sugar free versions).
1. **Sugar free medicines**

Sugar free medicines should be encouraged to avoid tooth decay. Parents should be advised to buy sugar free medicines themselves when purchasing for example paracetamol or ibuprofen and to ask their doctor to prescribe sugar free medicines.

1. **Visiting the dentist**

**When should a child first see a dentist?**

Parents should try and visit a dentist with their child by the time they are 1 year old. This gives parents an opportunity to gain advice about looking after their baby’s mouths and to build a positive experience of going to the dentist.

**Finding an NHS dentist**

Parents who need to find a dentist should be advised to look on the NHS Choices website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/dentists/Pages/find-an-NHS-dentist.aspx>

and insert postcode in the ‘[search for an NHS dentist near you](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Dentist/LocationSearch/3)’ section, this will show the nearest dentist accepting NHS patients. There is also a contact telephone number for those having trouble finding a dentist: NHS England's Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 2233.

For emergency dental treatment telephone the NHS service on 111.

You are entitled to free NHS dental services if, when your treatment starts, you are:

* aged under 18
* under 19 and in qualifying full-time education
* pregnant or have had a baby in the 12 months before treatment starts

Other exemptions also apply: <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Dentalcosts.aspx>

**Fluoride varnish**

Fluoride varnish is a thin coating of fluoride that is applied to teeth by a dentist or a qualified dental care professional. It is very effective at preventing tooth decay and is very easy and quick to apply. Children of all ages will benefit from fluoride varnish. It should be applied regularly to children 0-3 years who are at risk of tooth decay and to all children from 3 years. The dentist or dental care professional will apply it to children’s teeth as part of their routine check-up appointment.

1. **Resources about oral health**
* Red book contains information for parents about tooth development, tooth brushing, improving diet and visiting the dentist.
* NHS choices dental health pages:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Dental-decay/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

* Oral health for babies and children – iHV

<http://ihv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/GPP_Dental-hygene_V3-WEB.pdf>

* For early years oral health training contact Sheffield oral health promotion team on 0114 271 6142

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