

Briefing Note: Improving Oral Health in School-Aged Children in Swindon

To: Head Teachers and School Administrators

From: Public Health Specialist in Oral Health, Swindon Borough Council

Date:

Subject How Schools can help by adopting Supervised Toothbrushing in Reception classes.

1. Introduction

Children's Oral Health has been identified as a key public health priority for Swindon. This briefing note outlines the issue and how schools can help to improve oral health through the adoption of supervised toothbrushing.

2. Oral Health of children in Swindon

The latest data reveals concerning trends in oral health among Swindon's children:

- A significant percentage of children in Swindon experience dental decay by the age of 5.
- Some groups of children are at greater risk of poor oral health, particularly those living in deprived areas
- Emergency dental admissions for children are above the national average, reflecting a lack of early intervention – including good oral hygiene and access to high-street dentists.
- Most notably, Swindon has substantially higher rates of hospital tooth extractions in children per 100,000 than both the South West and England, particularly in 6-10-year olds.

3. Importance of Oral Health

Oral health is integral to general health and well-being, particularly during formative years. Poor oral health in childhood can lead to:

- Pain and discomfort, affecting nutrition and speech development.
- Increased absenteeism from school, impacting education.
- Long-term health issues, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

4. Supervised Toothbrushing Programmes

In response to these challenges, we have commenced the implementation of the national Supervised Toothbrushing Programme in Swindon, which has proven to be effective in other regions. Key elements of this programme include:

- **Routine Development:** Daily brushing instils a habit, enhancing long-term oral health.
- **Supervision and Support:** Toothbrushing done in a supervised and supportive environment helps to ensure that effective oral hygiene techniques are adopted early.
- **Equal Access:** Provides all children, regardless of background, access to dental care essentials.

Educational Component: Incorporates oral health education, reinforcing the importance of dental hygiene.

Schools across the South West have been signing up to deliver the programme, with most areas achieving 100%. However, in Swindon we only have around 1/3 of eligible schools signed up to the programme, despite us being an area of greatest need.

5. Offers of the Supervised Toothbrushing Programme

At Home Dental has been commissioned to implement this programme in schools. This work is initially targeted at those schools in the areas of highest deprivation. This programme can be tailored to suit each school's needs and may include:

- **Training for Staff:** Workshops to train teachers and support staff in implementing the programme effectively.
- **Resources Provision:** Providing toothbrushes, fluoride toothpaste, and educational materials.
- **Parental Engagement:** Information sessions and materials are available for parents to support oral health at home.

6. Other Programmes

Supervised Toothbrushing is just one of a large number of current or planned initiatives to improve children's oral health, for example:

- **The First Dental Steps Programme:** This is a proactive health initiative designed to promote dental health from a young age. It aims to prevent dental problems before they start by encouraging regular dentist visits and teaching toothbrushing skills. The programme will commence with children seen at the 1-year baby review carried out by Health Visitors. Advice, training and oral hygiene packs will be delivered. This early intervention approach helps instil healthy habits from a young age, setting the foundation for a lifetime of good oral health.
- **The National Dental Epidemiology Programme – Oral Health Survey of 5-year-old children:** This is a key health initiative that checks the oral health of young children. Every two years, dental professionals visit schools to examine 5-year-olds, counting any signs of tooth decay. This helps identify areas and groups where tooth problems are more common. The collected data guides public health policies and helps create targeted programs to prevent tooth decay among children, such as toothbrushing schemes in schools. This programme is crucial to making the case for improving children's dental health and promoting good habits early in life.

7. Conclusion

The Supervised Toothbrushing Programme is a national evidence-based programme that has proven to be effective in preventing /delaying the onset of oral health diseases. However, despite the apparent advantages of this programme, we are still experiencing low uptake across schools that have been contacted. Currently, only 19 out of 29 eligible schools have signed up to participate in this programme.

The implementation of the Supervised Toothbrushing Programme is a vital part of a strategic plan towards improving the oral health of Swindon's children. This initiative not only addresses immediate dental hygiene needs but also fosters a culture of health awareness and personal care from a young age. We'd very much appreciate your support in implementing the Programme and contributing to our joint public health effort.

8. Next Steps

Please see the attached leaflet for more information.

Please contact the Public Health Department at Swindon Borough Council for further information, concerns and queries.

Email: SwindonHealthySchools@swindon.gov.uk

Swindon Borough Council