

GROUND-BREAKING DENTAL NEGLECT POLICY UPDATED AND PUBLISHED



The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry's (BSPD's) policy document on dental neglect in children, which was originally developed and published in 2009, has been updated and published as an open access paper in the *International Journal of Paediatric Dentistry (IJPD)*.¹ The original dental neglect policy followed 'Child protection and the dental team', which was a significant document that first raised awareness in the UK of dental neglect, and was the point at which the urgent need for guidance for dental professionals was recognised.

Importantly the recommendations are broadly unchanged: at its heart remains the use of a three-tier model for responding to concerns. However, the new policy now reflects progress since 2009 in our understanding of dental neglect. An expanded section focuses on the broader impacts of dental disease. The update also includes references to examples of good practice that have developed over the intervening 14 years. The revised version is now written with the needs of both dental professionals and non-dental healthcare professionals in mind. The changes were made in response to feedback gathered via a focus group – and then modified further after consultation with stakeholders.

Dental neglect may occur in isolation or may be an indicator of a wider picture of neglect or abuse. Dental neglect may even be the first sign of child maltreatment. Dental professionals must know what to do if they are concerned

about a child. Dental neglect is very common, so we are likely to encounter it frequently; a survey in 2016 showed that 62% of paediatric dentists come across children with neglected dentitions daily or more often. This was unchanged since the previous survey in 2005.²

The team responsible for the dental neglect policy document update was led by Miss Lucy Ridsdale, who joined the original authorship team of Mrs Jenny Harris, Dr Richard Balmer and Professor Peter Sidebotham, together with new members Dr Fiona Gilchrist and, representing the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Dr Ruth Skelton.

BSPD continues to be committed to working with the dental profession and external stakeholders to raise awareness of dental neglect. A link to the updated document is available on the BSPD website.³

Dr Jenny Harris, BSPD Past-President said: 'BSPD's mission is to uphold the overall wellbeing of children and key to this is encouraging good safeguarding practice in dentistry. Keeping our research and recommendations up to date is important to ensure that those working within the dental profession are well-informed about dental neglect and its significance as a flag to overall neglect. I am extremely grateful to the diligent team of colleagues who worked with me on this updated policy document as we all continue to campaign for a reduction in oral health inequalities.'

References

1. Ridsdale L, Gilchrist F, Balmer RC, Skelton R, Sidebotham P D, Harris J C. British Society of Paediatric Dentistry: A policy document on dental neglect in children. *Int J Paediatr Dent* 2023; doi:10.1111/ipd.13120.
2. Harris J C, Baker S R, Elcock C. Paediatric dentists' role in child protection practice: progress over time? *Int J Paediatr Dent* 2022; **32**: 714–723.
3. British Society of Paediatric Dentistry. Policy Document. Available at: <https://www.bspd.co.uk/Professionals/Resources/Policy-Documents> (accessed November 2023).

Sugar levy delivering the goods in fight against decay

The British Dental Association (BDA) has said new evidence on the huge gains made in the fight against tooth decay secured by the sugar levy show how the Government must remain willing to force the hand of the food industry on reformulation.

Using data on hospital admissions for tooth extractions caused by decay, new research published in *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* suggests that 22 months after it was implemented, the Soft Drinks Industry Levy was associated with a 12% reduction in admissions amongst children aged 0 to 18 years.¹

Tooth decay is the number one reason for hospital admissions among young children, with over 42,000 extractions taking place in NHS hospitals in England last year on patients aged 18 or under.

The levy took out 47,000 tonnes of sugar from soft drinks in its first four years as it encouraged drinks manufacturers to reduce sugar levels to avoid the tax. The BDA stress its effectiveness is in sharp contrast to voluntary appeals to the food industry from the Government.

The BDA believes expansion of the levy into other product ranges – including milk-based drinks, biscuits, cakes, sweets, yoghurts and cereals – would drive widespread reformulation of high sugar foods and need not raise costs for consumers.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'The sugar levy is delivering the goods in the fight against decay, so it's time to double down.'

'This isn't about adding to the cost of living. When voluntary action has clearly failed, this shows government must force industry's hand on cutting sugar.'

References

1. Rogers N T, Conway D I, Mytton O *et al*. Estimated impact of the UK soft drinks industry levy on childhood hospital admissions for carious tooth extractions: interrupted time series analysis. *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* 2023; doi: 10.1136/bmjnp-2023-000714.

