

BSPD and FDS welcome supervised toothbrushing plan

The Labour Party announcement in October proposing a supervised toothbrushing scheme to target three, four and five-year-olds in the 20% most deprived areas in England was warmly received by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD).

Based on the CORE20 part of the CORE20PLUS5¹ initiative, the costed and funded proposal would see children attending schools and nurseries in areas of socioeconomic deprivation receiving supervised toothbrushing and a supply of toothbrushes and toothpaste to take home.

BSPD has been calling for supervised toothbrushing in England for children for over ten years. The Society welcomes this support for families in a cost-of-living crisis. There is evidence from Scotland² that reaching children as early as possible with supervised toothbrushing schemes gives them a better oral health start to life and is more cost-effective in the long term for the NHS. Additional investment has also been announced, increasing the number of children who should be able to see an NHS dentist.

Professor Claire Stevens CBE, BSPD Spokesperson said: 'This is a serious plan to grip both the immediate crisis and set NHS dentistry on the path to recovery in the long-term. BSPD believes that every child should have a 'dental home' – an ongoing and preventively focused relationship with an NHS dentist. However, with children's dental services in crisis, we urgently need to put a blanket of support around the most vulnerable children in our society. We must recognise that, through no fault of their own, some children need greater help to get the oral health start in life that every child deserves.

'We therefore welcome these measures as we know we need urgent action to address the persistent and immoral inequalities we see in children's oral health. Intervening with a targeted supervised toothbrushing scheme is proven to deliver beneficial oral health outcomes that also pay for themselves severalfold in the future.'



Faculty strongly supports plan

Commenting on Labour's rescue plan for NHS dentistry, Dr Charlotte Eckhardt, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, said:

'Primarily, we need a greater focus on prevention. It is shameful that removing teeth, rotted by preventable tooth decay, is consistently the main reason children are admitted to hospital and is a clear indicator of health inequalities. We strongly support supervised tooth brushing in schools and nurseries – this is now urgent. We know that children in deprived areas are at greater risk of poor oral health. By establishing supervised tooth brushing in school settings, we can directly improve children's oral health and influence their tooth brushing routine in the home.

'We also know that if children are waiting over a year in pain to have rotten teeth removed, there clearly remain some very worrying access issues, which the Government needs to address.

'There's still a huge backlog of NHS dental appointments after the pandemic, so the additional funding that has been suggested for NHS dental practices to provide more urgent appointments would be welcome.

'The dental contract needs to be reformed in order to rebuild the service in the long-run. It's important that this process engages

with the dentists who are at the forefront of delivering the service. The current targets are not attainable.

'The Faculty of Dental Surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons of England also strongly supports the development of new fluoridation schemes. It is particularly key for reducing health inequalities. The areas with the lowest rates of children's tooth extractions have water fluoridation schemes. If all five-year-olds in England drank fluoridated water, we would see much less tooth decay – 17% less in wealthy areas and 28% less in the most deprived areas.³ It is important that we quickly expand water fluoridation schemes across England.'

References

1. NHS England. Core20PLUS5 – An approach to reducing health inequalities for children and young people. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/core20plus5/core20plus5-cyp/> (accessed October 2023).
2. Gray-Burrows K A, Day P F, El-Yousfi S, Lloyd E, Hudson K, Marshman Z. A national survey of supervised toothbrushing programmes in England. *Br Dent J* 2023; doi: 10.1038/s41415-023-6182-1.
3. Department of Health & Social Care. Policy paper: Health and Care Bill: water fluoridation. 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-care-bill-factsheets/health-and-care-bill-water-fluoridation#:~:text=PHE%20estimated%20that%20if%20all,in%20the%20most%20deprived%20areas> (accessed October 2023).