

# Smiles all round

With several local authorities rolling out tooth brushing schemes, here's what you need to know before implementing one in your own setting

**T**ooth decay is the most common oral disease affecting children in England, despite being largely preventable.

Poor oral hygiene can cause pain and infections and make it difficult for children to sleep.

Last year, Public Health England worked with 4Children on a pilot tooth brushing scheme in early years settings, with the potential for a nationwide roll-out at a later date.

Several local authorities already have tooth brushing programmes for the early years in place, and Public Health England has published a toolkit to help early years practitioners deliver a programme of supervised tooth brushing in their settings. Even if your local area hasn't joined the scheme, supervised tooth brushing could still be a welcome and low-cost addition to your daily routine.

Evidence suggests that brushing the teeth twice daily can help reduce the risk and severity of tooth decay in young children. But unfortunately, not all children brush twice a day as recommended. By introducing a teeth-brushing schedule at your setting, you could help children establish a routine. Good oral hygiene habits will set them up for better oral health in the long-term and could help prevent childhood tooth decay.

## Getting ready

Before you start, you'll need to seek permission from all parents and keep a record of their responses. Those that already have a tooth-brushing routine might choose to opt out.

You might also want to team up with a dental professional to help shape your tooth brushing routine and answer any questions you come across. You should appoint one member of your team to lead organisation of the programme and oversee hygiene procedures.

For children under three years old, you should use just a smear of toothpaste made with 1,000 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride. For those three and above, use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing 1,350 to 1,500 ppm fluoride.

Choose the best time to brush teeth each day. It could be after lunch or a snack or whenever fits best with your usual routine. If you're sharing a tube between several children, apply it to a clean surface such as a paper towel or plate rather than directly on to the toothbrushes to prevent spreading germs. Discourage children from swallowing toothpaste and encourage them to spit out any excess paste without rinsing their teeth with water.

## Time to brush

Each child should be able to identify their brush – label them all with their names using a waterproof marker. If any child accidentally swallows the paste, don't reapply any more. Opt for small-headed toothbrushes with soft bristles – these should be replaced termly or as soon as they appear damaged or if ever one is dropped on the floor.

The children should brush for two minutes each day. Encourage them to work on their technique to ensure they reach every tooth. They can be standing or seated for this activity and can spit any excess toothpaste into a tissue or paper towel to limit the need for sink space and reduce the spread of germs. Tissues and paper towels should be put in the bin as soon as the group is finished.

After each child has finished, rinse their brushes under cold running water and leave them to air dry. They shouldn't be washed together in a sink or soaked in any cleaner or bleach. Sinks and storage areas for the brushes should be regularly cleaned. Keep the brushes away from the sink area, somewhere at adult height, to prevent cross contamination.

## Further action

If a child finds that their gums are bleeding when brushing, discard the tissues in the same way as you would for a nose bleed. Speak to their parents so that they can arrange a check-up with their dentist in case there are any underlying problems. Working with a local dental surgery could offer a point of contact for this and help encourage parents to take children along for regular check-ups. You could organise a visit from a dentist or dental nurse to help explain the importance of oral hygiene to parents and talk them through which foods are bad for their children's teeth. Make sure that parents are aware that tooth brushing in your setting should not replace regular brushing at home and that children should be brushing their teeth twice each day.

## For more information

To read Public Health England's full toolkit, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-oral-health-supervised-tooth-brushing-programme-toolkit](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-oral-health-supervised-tooth-brushing-programme-toolkit)

