

Toothpaste too pricey for the poor

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Fluoride toothpaste is prohibitively expensive for the world's poorest people, according to a study published in BioMed Central's open access journal *Globalization and Health*. Researchers revealed that the poorest populations of developing countries have the least access to affordable toothpaste.

The team, which includes Ann Goldman of the School of Public Health and Health Services at the George Washington University in Washington D.C., Robert Yee and Christopher Holmgren of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre at Radboud University Medical Centre in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and Habib Benzian of the FDI World Dental Federation compared the relative affordability of fluoride toothpaste in 48 countries.

Globalization has led to a worldwide tendency to eat a more westernized diet, which is higher in carbohydrates and refined sugars. This has resulted in an increasing prevalence of tooth decay in developing countries, which can lead to malnutrition and a reduced quality of life. The cost and relative unavailability of dental care in poorer countries means that tooth decay usually remains untreated.

Fluoride toothpaste is the most widely used method of preventing dental decay, but currently only 12.5% of the world benefits from it. The researchers believe that the low-use of fluoride toothpaste is due to its cost, which is too high in some parts of the world. This study is the first to attempt to quantify the affordability of toothpaste across the globe.

Questionnaires regarding the cost of fluoride toothpaste were completed by dental associations, non-government oral health organisations and individuals around the world. The cost of a year's worth of toothpaste for one person was calculated as both a proportion of household expenditure and in terms of the number of days of work needed to cover the cost.

The results showed that in different income groups in various countries, as the per capita income decreased, the proportion of income needed to purchase a year's supply of toothpaste increased; the poorest in each country being the hardest hit.

"Because of the importance of fluoride toothpaste in preventing tooth decay, it must be made more available to the world's poorest populations," commented Goldman, "steps should be taken to make fluoride toothpaste more affordable and more accessible." The authors suggest that this can be done by exempting fluoride toothpaste from taxation, encouraging the local manufacture of fluoride toothpaste and persuading multinational manufacturers to implement different pricing policies for poorer countries.

Source: BioMed Central

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