

## **Project reduces toddler tooth decay**

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The answer to early childhood tooth decay could be just a phone call away, thanks to new research by the University of Queensland and Queensland Health.

In a study conducted in Brisbane's south, where 23 per cent of toddlers suffer from substantial <u>dental decay</u>, researchers have found preventative strategies could be the solution to the enormous cost of poor oral health on our public system.

Oral health education and support for mothers, including <u>home visits</u> and telephone calls, were found to reduce the rate of decay in children down to 2 per cent.

Kathryn Plonka, UQ School of Dentistry PhD candidate and Senior Oral Health Therapist at Logan-Beaudesert Public Oral Health Service, based her research on more than 1000 mothers and their children in the Logan-Beaudesert Area.

This area has some of the highest prevalence of <u>tooth decay</u> in Queensland. Through home visits, Ms Plonka's project helped reduced the rate of decay to just 2 per cent and down to 7 per cent via regular telephone calls.

"We wanted to find out what kind of <u>preventative measures</u> would help communities the most and the drastic improvements we saw from both home visits and telephone support were exciting," Ms Plonka said.



According to Ms Plonka, the current model of care predominantly supports a "drill and fill" approach with minimal emphasis placed on prevention.

The research also revealed that prenatal education had a vital role in ensuring children's oral health.

"When a child is born, the mouth is sterile and <u>oral bacteria</u> is acquired over the first couple years of life, so timing of prevention is everything," Ms Plonka said.

"Mums are so busy and tired with baby in the first few months it makes sense to include <u>oral health</u> care in prenatal education."

In both the home visit education program and the telephone education program, Ms Plonka used tooth brushing instruction and general <u>dietary</u> <u>advice</u> six monthly from birth. The mothers could contact the program for advice and support as their children progressed.

The children who still developed tooth decay in the study were found to be more likely to have developmental defects in tooth enamel, which occur pre-birth and are very difficult to prevent.

"The effects of preventative education not only reduces the rate of decay in children, but can contribute to developing informed, healthy habits and therefore reduce adult decay later on," Ms Plonka said.

**More information:** To find out more about Ms Plonka's Preventive Strategies for Early Childhood Caries (ECC) from Antenatal to Age 36 Months head to <u>www.dentistry.uq.edu.au/paediatric-caries</u>.



## Provided by University of Queensland

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