

A supervised toothbrushing toolkit to tackle tooth decay in children

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Credit: Keira Burton from Pexels

A new toolkit to increase supervised toothbrushing for younger children aims to address health equalities caused by tooth decay.

Researchers from the University of Sheffield, University of Leeds and Bradford Improvement Academy, have developed free [online resources](#) for NHS organizations, local government, schools, nurseries and parents, as part of the BRUSH project to better support existing and new toothbrushing programs.

A quarter of 5-year-olds in England have tooth decay, this can rise up to 50% in deprived areas of the country. The burden of tooth decay is significant, causing pain, as well as affecting what children eat, their speech, sleep, quality of life and attendance at nursery or school.

Treatment of decay is the most common reason why young children are admitted to hospital (33,000 each year), costing the NHS more than £50 million annually.

Co-lead of the study, Professor Zoe Marshman, Professor in Dental Public Health at the University of Sheffield, said, "One of the key ways to prevent tooth decay is toothbrushing with a fluoride toothpaste. Toothbrushing programs in nurseries and early years at school are really important to complement toothbrushing at home.

"We already know supervised toothbrushing programs for young children are effective in reducing tooth decay, and easy for nurseries/schools to run. However, the uptake and maintenance of these programs has been fragmented.

"The new toolkit will make it easier for new toothbrushing programs to be set up, meaning more children will be able to benefit from the programs so less children suffer from [tooth decay](#) and its consequences."

The BRUSH project was conducted by researchers from the University of Sheffield, University of Leeds and Bradford Improvement Academy. The researchers worked with NIHR Applied Research Collaboration

Yorkshire and Humber to understand how best to implement and evaluate supervised toothbrushing programs.

Co-lead of the BRUSH study, Dr. Kara Gray-Burrows Lecturer in Behavioral Science & Complex Intervention Methodology at the University of Leeds, said, "We know that there's good practice and excellent resources out there, so our project was about bringing together all that's already good and seeing what gaps there were.

"The toolkit is a central one-stop-shop sharing best practice and containing new materials we have developed to give organizations setting up these programs, nurseries, schools, parents and children the relevant information and resources easily."

Talking about the toothbrushing club at Tinsley Meadows Primary Academy in Sheffield, David Yates (Nursery Teacher), said, "At first I did think, we're going to do toothbrushing now and we've got 60 children, what if it is chaos and they're all brushing each other's hair or things like that! But they are really good at it, seem to enjoy and engage with it."

Professor Claire Stevens CBE, Spokesperson from The British Society of Pediatric Dentistry, said, "BSPD welcomes the BRUSH initiative. We know that a targeted supervised toothbrushing approach is one of the priority solutions to tackling the oral health inequalities in our society.

"The fact that BRUSH will provide a new free access-to-all toolkit to help facilitate supervised toothbrushing will go a long way to making this simple but highly effective intervention get traction. It will improve young children's oral health in the short term while setting them on the path to a lifetime of good oral care practice for life.

"While BSPD believes that every child should have a 'dental home'—an

ongoing and preventively focused relationship with an NHS dentist, with children's dental services in crisis, we urgently need to take a creative approach to address the persistent and immoral inequalities we see in children's oral health. BRUSH provides a wonderful toolkit that will help everyone showing children how to clean their teeth."

Hayden Ridsdale, Strategy and Transformation Program Manager, NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, said, "As a commissioner of dental services in West Yorkshire I think the BRUSH toolkit is a fantastic resource to enable the implementation of supervised toothbrushing schemes. In West Yorkshire we've embedded it into our contracts with our five local authority partners to ensure good practice guides service delivery."

Provided by University of Sheffield

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