

Supervised tooth brushing and fluoride varnish schemes benefit kids and the health economy

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Action to prevent tooth decay in children, such as supervised tooth brushing and fluoride varnish schemes, are not just beneficial to children's oral health but could also result in cost savings to the NHS of hundreds of pounds per child, so says a leading dental health researcher.

Professor Elizabeth Kay, Foundation Dean of the Peninsula Dental School from Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, has carried out the first economic evaluation of public health measures to reduce tooth decay in [children](#) at high risk, in association with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the York Health Economic Consortium. She will present her findings at this year's British Society for Oral and Dental Research Annual Meeting in Cardiff, 14th to 16th September.

Almost 26,000 children a year aged between five and nine are admitted to hospital for dental treatment under general and local anaesthetic in the UK, for conditions which are on the whole preventable through better understanding and adoption of good oral health routines.

In her study Professor Kay found that, taking the threshold value used by NICE of £20,000 per Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY), preventive schemes targeted at high risk children would be considered to be cost-effective even if they cost £46 per year per child for tooth brushing or £62 per child per year for fluoride varnish schemes. This would represent a saving of hundreds of pounds per child when compared with the cost of surgical treatments in hospital.

QALY is used in assessing the value for money of a medical intervention.

The model showed that for children at high risk of

oral disease, supervised brushing and fluoride varnish schemes are cost-effective options.

Said Professor Kay: "We have more work to do here to translate the results of our study into policy, but I must stress that this is about more than making better use of NHS funds, and demonstrating that [oral health](#) promotion programmes offer extremely good value for money. I think it is a national outrage that so many children in the UK are admitted to hospital for surgical procedures for conditions which are by and large preventable. If there was a health issue that resulted in this number of children having another body part removed under general or local anaesthetic there would be a justifiable national outcry, yet for many reasons tooth extraction appears to have become accepted in some circles. This study demonstrates that it is also economically viable and sensible to prevent [tooth decay](#)"

She added: "By showing sound economic reasons for increasing the use of preventative measures, such as tooth brushing and fluoride varnishing, I hope that they can now compete for resource against other less cost-effective interventions."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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