



What is Toothday?

Toothday is taking place in 2,500 primary schools with 120,000 children in the Republic of Ireland on Tuesday, November 30th, 2010.

The aim of ‘Toothday’ is to raise awareness on the importance of oral health among children. This is being done in two ways – encouraging them to brush their teeth twice a day and making them aware of tooth friendly snacks and drinks.

Evidence suggest that ‘settings’ can have a significant effect on dental health¹ and for this reason the school setting was chosen for this initiative. Junior and senior infant classes will be supplied with a goodie pack containing a tube of Aquafresh toothpaste and an official Toothday Certificate to encourage the child to commit to twice daily tooth brushing.

Teachers have been invited to download a presentation on ‘The Tooth’ which that they can deliver quickly and easily to their class. The presentation is in a child friendly format; and it teaches children how to look after their teeth through a combination of regular tooth brushing and a tooth friendly diet.

It is envisaged that this event will be delivered annually in collaboration with our partners, Aquafresh and the National Dairy Council and the Irish Dental Association.

Background Information

What is dental caries (tooth decay)?

Dental caries is also known as tooth decay. Dental caries affects the teeth, starting with the enamel of the tooth surface; dental caries can occur on any of the surfaces of teeth including the biting surface and can also be hidden from sight in the grooves of the teeth or between teeth. Tooth decay is the single most common chronic disease of childhood.

How many 5 year olds in Ireland have tooth decay?

The most recent national survey of children’s oral health² found that of those living in areas with fluoridated water more than one in three (37%) children have dental decay by the age of 5. In areas where there is no fluoride in the water, over half (55%) of all 5 year olds in non-fluoridated areas have experienced dental decay.

What causes tooth decay?

¹ Rodrigues, C.S, Watt, R.G. & Sheiham, A. (1999). Effects of dietary guidelines on sugar intake and dental caries in 3-year-olds attending nurseries in Brazil. *Health Promotion International*, 14(4): 329-355

² (Whelton, H., Crowley, E., O’Mullane, D., Harding M., Guiney, H., Cronin, M., Flannery, E. & Kelleher, V. (2006) *North South Survey of Children’s Oral Health in Ireland 2002*. Brunswick Press Ltd.



Dental Health Foundation
Ireland



Dental caries is caused when acids attack the enamel surface and removes minerals from it leading to a cavity. Acids are produced when sugars in food and drinks react with the plaque in the mouth.

While it is recommended to limit one's intake of sugars, sugars are least damaging to teeth when they are consumed at meal time. Sugars are most damaging to teeth when they are consumed at frequent throughout the day, i.e. between meals.

Children in the Republic of Ireland have amongst the highest frequency of consumption of foods and drinks sweetened with sugar when compared with 34 other countries. Almost 1/3 (31%) of 5 year olds³ consume sweet food or drinks between meals twice a day. Sugars between meals are very damaging to teeth, so these trends are worrying.

What is the impact of tooth decay?

Dental decay and dental treatment is traumatic for a child; it results in pain, it can lead to infection and even hospitalisation to have teeth extracted under general anaesthetic⁴

Decay in baby teeth can predict not only 'future dental problems but also growth and cognitive development by interfering with comfort nutrition, concentration and school participation' (Gussy *et al.*, 2006).

If a baby tooth is decayed or extracted, this can result in spacing issues for secondary teeth.⁵

How can I prevent tooth decay?

There is limited data on the tooth brushing behaviours of 5 year olds apart from research by Parnell *et al.* (2002) which found that less than half of five year olds brushed their teeth twice a day and 37% of 5 year olds did so unaided by an adult.

³ Parnell, C., Connolly, E., O'Farrell, M., Cronin, M., Flannery, E., Whelton, H. (2002) *Oral health of 5-year-old children in the northeast 2002*. Health Service Executive Dublin North East.

⁴ Gussy, M.G., Waters, E.G., Walsh, O., Kilpatrick, N.M. (2006). Early childhood caries: Current evidence for aetiology and prevention. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*. 42: 37-43.

⁵ Dental Health Foundation (1999) *Oral Health in Ireland*. Oral Health Services Research Centre, Cork, Department of Health and Children.



1. Regular tooth brushing:

All children from the age of 2 should be encouraged to brush their teeth;

- With fluoride toothpaste containing at least 1,000 ppm F (parts per million Fluoride)
- Twice a day
- At bedtime and at one other time during the day
- Using a small pea size amount of toothpaste (up to age 7).
- Children under the age of 7 should be supervised by an adult when brushing their teeth.
- Children should be encouraged to spit out toothpaste and not rinse after brushing.

Parents and carers of children aged 0-2 are encouraged to brush their child's teeth as soon as the first tooth appears, using a soft toothbrush and water only. It is not recommended to use toothpaste for children aged 0-2 years.

2. Snacking recommendations:

It is recommended that sugary foods and drinks are kept to meal times as much as possible and to limit frequency of intake of sugars outside of mealtimes. It is recommended that suitable between-meal drinks are milk and water with a number of foods such as fruit, vegetables or breads being recommended as healthy snacks⁶.

3. Visit your dentist:

It is recommended that children are taken to their dentist regularly.

Why should I look after baby teeth?

Research shows if a child has dental decay at a young age that they are likely to have dental decay as an adult. We all want to have healthy teeth and nice smiles as adults and this starts with taking care of children's teeth from a young age.

The health benefits of good oral health are immense; getting children actively involved in looking after their oral health from an early age reduces their level of both oral and general ill-health as an adult. As part of the activities of 'Toothday' we encourage children to visit their dentist on a regular basis.

The Dental Health Foundation, along with its partners in this important initiative, is delighted to be taking such a positive step to improve the oral health of children in Ireland.

Thank you for your support.

⁶ Oral Health Services Research Centre, University College Cork and Dental Health Foundation, Ireland (Unpublished) Oral Health in Ireland, 2nd Edition.