

Opinion

The importance of oral health promotion in reducing the burden of diseases.

Oral diseases pose a major health burden for many countries, including Ireland, and affect people throughout their lifetime, causing pain, discomfort, disfigurement, and in extreme cases, even death. Oral disease prevention is central to the oral health promotion messages that the Dental Health Foundation (DHF) advocates for. Tooth decay is the most chronic childhood disease and the World Health Organization states that according to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017, untreated tooth decay in permanent teeth is the most common health condition. Severe periodontal (gum) disease, which may result in tooth loss, is also very common, with almost 10% of the global population affected. Factors contributing to oral diseases include poor oral hygiene, an unhealthy diet high in sugar, use of tobacco and harmful use of alcohol.

Most oral health conditions are largely preventable and can be treated in their early stages. Oral Health Promotion is an integral part of prevention, it is important to everyone's daily routine, not just those at risk, to help reduce treatment need, avoidable dental visits, and healthcare costs.

DHF promotes oral health through developing key messages to improve oral hygiene and about making healthier food and drink choices.

We look for opportunities to embed oral health promotion within all health and wellbeing policies and strategies. We promote oral health among vulnerable groups; young children, people with diabetes, people who smoke, consume high quantities of alcohol or participating in a methadone treatment programme, the elderly and other locally identified vulnerable groups. We are an authoritative source of advice and information providing the tools and support needed for oral health promotion.

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Our website offers an excellent source of factual and useful information:

<https://www.dentalhealth.ie/resources/oral-health-promotion/>

We use a life course approach to identifying need as different stages of people's lives bring different oral health challenges. It is important that oral health promotion interventions are designed to address changes in need.

As outlined in our White Paper on the Implementation of Oral Health Promotion (2012)

https://www.dentalhealth.ie/assets/files/pdf/white_paper_2012.pdf - which is more relevant than ever, we all need to 'Walk the Talk'.

'The Foundation is working collaboratively with many other organisations and bodies to ensure that:

- 1. It is well informed on important issues relevant to oral and general health.*
- 2. Integration of oral health promotion into general health promotion.*
- 3. That the message regarding oral and general health is communicated in an effective manner'*

This is supported by the recent and timely official statement from the *FDI World Dental Federation* Council regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic which outlines key principles for dental practice and oral health promotion *'Oral health professionals should take every opportunity to communicate and reinforce oral disease prevention messages to help reduce treatment need, avoidable dental visits and healthcare costs'*. The FDI further states that *'Oral health is a fundamental component of overall health and well-being, and oral healthcare is an essential public service that must be made as broadly accessible as possible. Authorities should ensure regulations do not unnecessarily impede access to oral healthcare and put measures in place to*

improve access where feasible, including tele-dentistry services, emergency clinics and oral health promotion initiatives’.

As DHF have repeatedly stated over the years, it is important that all of us who work in the area of health promotion continue to collaborate and to recognise the benefit that the promotion of both oral and general health can bring to the people of Ireland.