

# Healthy Smiles for Children Looked After

*What can we do?*

A resource for carers and guardians

Children Looked After



Healthy Smiles

This booklet has been co-developed with carers and guardians of Children Looked After (CLA) with the aim of providing overview on:

- 1) The dental health of children looked-after
- 2) The importance of maintaining good dental health in children looked-after
- 3) Dental neglect
- 4) Oral Health needs assessment: a statutory requirement
- 5) How to promote good dental health?
- 6) Answers to commonly asked questions including:
  - ❖ How to identify common problems?
  - ❖ Emergencies and dental trauma?
  - ❖ How to find a dentist and when to visit?
  - ❖ What children are entitled to on the NHS for their dental care?
  - ❖ Consent for dental treatment
  - ❖ Orthodontics (braces)
  - ❖ Helping children with additional needs
  - ❖ Where to go for more information?

## Dental Health of Children Looked-After

Children Looked After (CLA) have greater dental health needs including increased risk of tooth decay and are less likely to use dental services than their peers.

Some children may not have seen a dentist before, and others may not be used brushing their teeth regularly.

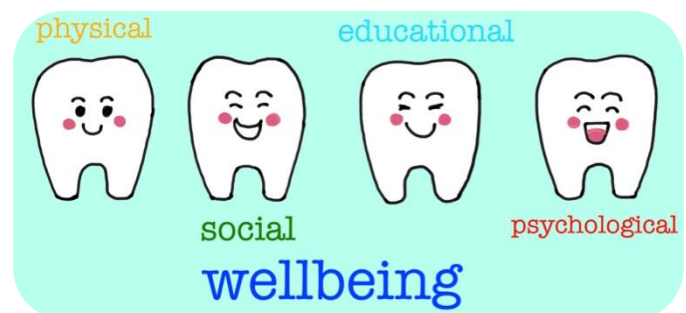
CLA's dental health are negatively affected by:

- ❖ Poor dental hygiene
- ❖ Prolonged use of bottles
- ❖ Increased risk of unhealthy behaviours including irregular tooth brushing and unhealthy diets:

## Importance of dental health in children looked-after

Good dental health is essential to children's physical, social, educational and psychological wellbeing.

Tooth decay is caused by a combination of plaque (bacteria) on the teeth and frequent intake of sugary food and drinks. Plaque is a thin, sticky film that keeps forming on teeth and contains many types of bacteria. Over time the plaque acids dissolve away the tooth structure causing holes to form.



Tooth decay in children is largely preventable. It is therefore important to:

- ❖ reduce the intake of sugary food and drinks
- ❖ brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- ❖ visit the dentist

## Statutory Dental Health Assessment

The Local Authority under which the Child is Looked-After has a statutory obligation to promote their welfare.

By law, all children looked-after must have a health needs assessment at least once a year. This includes an oral (dental) health assessment by a dentist. The initial overall health assessment must be conducted within 28 days of a child first becoming looked-after:

- ❖ For under 5s this must be done every 6 months
- ❖ For 5+ this must be done annually

Health assessments will lead to identification of any dental treatment needs which must then be addressed and children are required to attend a dentist at least once per year.

It is important that foster carers and residential care staff know it is their responsibility to make sure a child attends their health assessment and all other medical, dental and optical appointments, and facilitate any required treatment regimes.

# How to promote good dental health in children?

## Diet

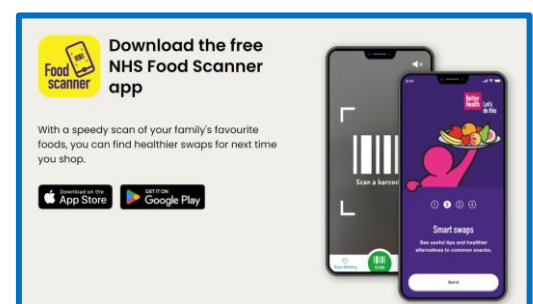


- ❖ Breastfeeding exclusively for the first 6 months is recommended
- ❖ First formula milk is the only suitable alternative to breast milk
- ❖ Bottle fed babies should be introduced to drinking from a free-flow cup from the age of 6 months and bottle feeding should be discouraged from 12 months

- ❖ Milk and water are the only suitable drinks for infants
- ❖ Gradually introduce a wide variety of solid foods from around the age of 6 months

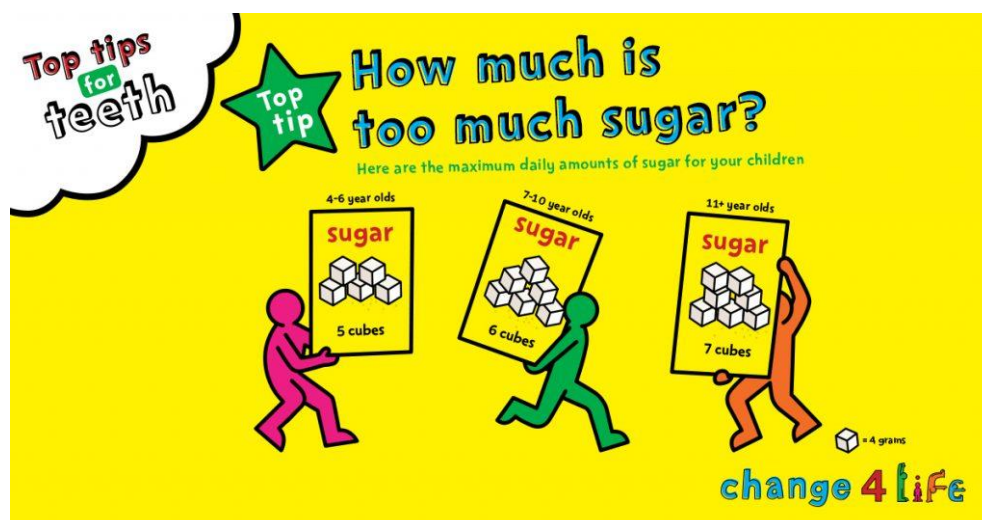
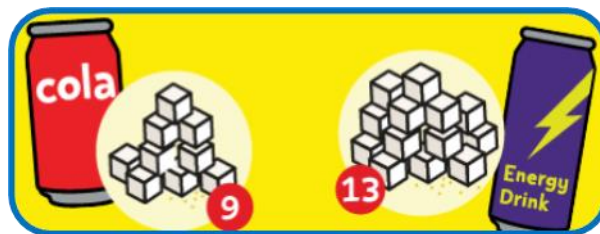
## Be Sugar Smart!

- ❖ Eat a well-balanced diet which includes 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- ❖ Reduce amount and frequency of foods and drinks that contain sugar
- ❖ Limit the amount of fruit juice and smoothies (which contain sugars) a child drinks to a maximum of 150ml (1 portion) in total per day and drink it with meals
- ❖ Use the NHS Food Scanner App to see how much sugar, fat and salt there is in your supermarket basket. It is free to download on your mobile phone
- ❖ Always ask for sugar free medicines



## Advice for teenagers and young adults on other drinks

- ❖ The government has banned the sale of energy drinks (e.g. Redbull, Monster and Lucozade etc) to children under the age of 16. Energy drinks are soft drinks that typically have higher caffeine and more sugar than other regular soft drinks.
- ❖ Fizzy drinks and energy drinks are often acidic. Acid in fizzy drinks can cause cavities in teeth and teeth to become worn if consumed regularly.
- ❖ It is helpful to swap to fizzy or energy drinks containing free sugars for water, lower fat milk or sugar-free alternative.



## Toothbrushing

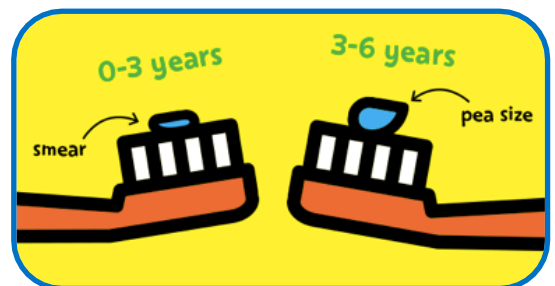
- ❖ Brush children's teeth as soon as they come through
- ❖ Brush teeth twice daily: last thing at night and at least on one other occasion with a fluoride toothpaste
- ❖ The amount of fluoride in the toothpaste will be recommended by the dentist and is usually between 1000-1500ppm depending on the child's age and dental health risk, generally:

- ❖ **Children under 3 should use:**

- ❖ toothpaste containing at least 1000ppm fluoride
- ❖ using only a smear of toothpaste
- ❖ It is advised that children under the age of 7 should be assisted and supervised with tooth brushing.

- ❖ **Children aged 3 plus should use:**

- ❖ toothpaste containing at least 1000ppm fluoride
- ❖ using a pea sized amount

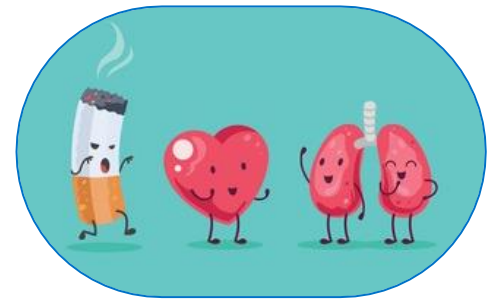


- ❖ children should spit and not rinse after brushing
- ❖ it is advised that children under the age of 7 should be assisted and supervised with tooth brushing.
- ❖ children over the age of 7 with additional needs may still require help brushing.
- ❖ small headed and medium textured toothbrushes should be used and changed when bristles are splayed

## Smoking

### Advice for teenagers and young adults on smoking

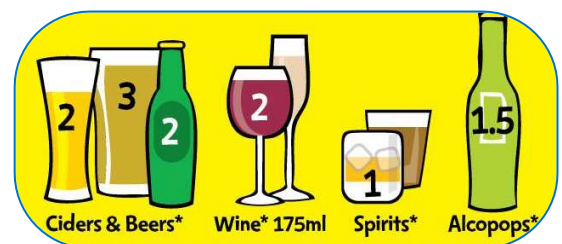
- ❖ Smoking should be discouraged. If a child is smoking, please contact your local Stop Smoking team or speak to the GP for advice. **To find your local stop smoking service, go to stop smoking services** or find your local stop smoking service
- ❖ Smoking is illegal to those under 18 years old
- ❖ Smoking is harmful for the body and mouth
- ❖ Vaping and e-cigarettes is illegal for under 18s and should be discouraged in children
- ❖ Second-hand smoke is harmful for children



## Alcohol

### Advice for teenagers and young adults on alcohol

- ❖ Children and young people are advised not to drink alcohol before the age of 18
- ❖ Alcohol use during the teenage years is related to a wide range of health and social problems.
- ❖ Alcohol consumption to those who are 18 and over should be limited to a maximum of 14 units per week
  - ❖ 1 unit of alcohol is approximately half a pint of normal-strength beer or a single measure (25ml) of spirits. A small glass of wine equals 1.5-2 units of alcohol
- ❖ Aim for at least 2 alcohol free days a week





## Frequently asked questions

### How do you find a local NHS dentist?

Here are a few ideas that may help:

- ❖ There is no need to register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP because patients are not bound to a catchment area. Simply find a dental surgery that's convenient and phone them to see if any appointments are available.



- ❖ You can search for a dentist on this [site](#):
- ❖ Please contact the child's social worker/ looked after children's team if you are having trouble finding an NHS dentist

- ❖ NHS dental care is free for children who are under 18 years old
  - Courses of treatment that are started before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and completed afterwards are free
- ❖ If children are still in full-time education, then NHS dental care is free up until the age of 19 years old
  - Courses of treatment that are started before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and completed afterwards are free



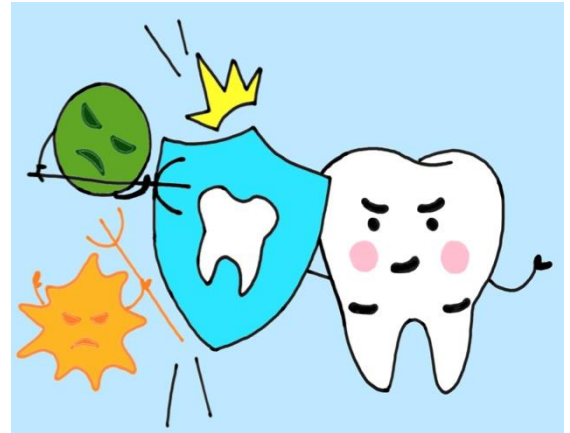
### Impacts of COVID-19 on NHS dental services

The COVID pandemic has had impacts on health services including NHS dental services. Dental teams are working hard and prioritising patients who need urgent dental care.

What is the cost of NHS dental care for children?

## What treatment can be expected on the NHS for children?

- ❖ Everything that is required to secure good dental health
- ❖ Prevention advice and treatment can be included at dental visits
- ❖ Children over the age of 3 can get their teeth coated with fluoride varnish twice a year to help prevent tooth decay
- ❖ Children can get the full range of NHS dental care
- ❖ Children who are thought to be of higher risk of decay (e.g. they already have some decay in their teeth, or who have already had fillings) may be offered other types of prevention on the NHS.



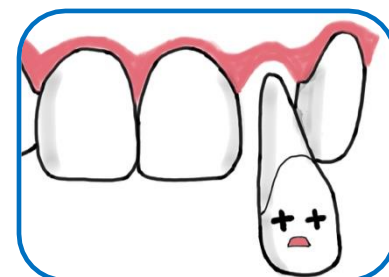
## What signs should you look for if a child has dental problems?

- ❖ Pain
- ❖ Swelling or redness around and/or inside the mouth
- ❖ Ulcers/ 'gumboils'
- ❖ Red/swollen gums, bleeding gums during brushing
- ❖ Crowded teeth or front teeth that stick out

## What arrangements are there for children requiring NHS urgent dental care?

The following are dental emergencies, which need quick action:

- ❖ A knocked out or knocked out of place tooth
- ❖ A broken tooth
- ❖ Swelling in the mouth and/or face
- ❖ Dental pain affecting eating, drinking and sleeping



Check the following [website](#) for specific dental trauma management

**If a child requires urgent dental care, you can either:**

- ❖ **Call your dentist** in the first instance.
- ❖ If you do not have a dentist, **call NHS 111** who will pass you on to the Dental Triage team, who will provide the appropriate advice and offer an appointment in a dental practice nearby

**Go to A&E only if** the eye or neck is swollen, or if swelling in the mouth or neck causes difficulties in breathing, swallowing or speaking.

## When should babies and infants first visit a dentist?



- ❖ Take children to the dentist when their teeth first come through (usually at around 6 months old) or by the age of 1 at the latest
- ❖ Children that regularly attend the dentist from 6 months will have a healthy start and get them used to the dental practice from an early age
- ❖ Dentists will give crucial advice regarding infant feeding, brushing and diet

## How often should a child or young person see a dentist?



- ❖ Take children to an NHS dentist at least once a year
- ❖ CLA under 5 years old should be taken to the dentist at least every 6 months and those aged over 5 years old should be taken at least once annually
- ❖ The dentist will give guidance on whether children and young people need to see them more regularly depending on their oral health risk

## What toothbrush should children and young adults use?

- ❖ For manual toothbrushes use a small headed and medium texture toothbrush
- ❖ For electric toothbrushes use a round headed oscillating toothbrush
- ❖ Toothbrushes should be changed when bristles are splayed approximately every 3 months
- ❖ In some children with limited cooperation a 3-sided toothbrush may be used
- ❖ If the child has increased sensory stimulation in cases of Autism, ask the dentist for advice

## What is the advice on sugary food and drinks?

- ❖ Eat a well-balanced diet which includes 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- ❖ Reduce amount and frequency of foods and drinks that contain sugar
- ❖ Use the NHS Food Scanner App to see how much sugar, fat and salt there is in your supermarket basket. It is free to download on your mobile phone

## How can children access orthodontic care (braces) they are entitled to?



- ❖ A child needs to attend the dentist who will assess their need for orthodontic care (braces) and refer them to the orthodontist if necessary
- ❖ Not all children are entitled to orthodontic treatment on the NHS, the dentist and orthodontist will use an assessment rating system, which will help them decide.
- ❖ If the child is assessed and told they are not eligible for braces on the NHS, you are entitled to seek a second opinion however it is unlikely to change the outcome

## What arrangements for specialist dental services in London?

- ❖ The regular dentist usually accesses other specialist care through referrals to the local specialist dental services including Paediatrics (children's dentist), Community and Special Care.
- ❖ Children with additional needs can be referred to this services via the regular dentist. These services can provide dental treatment under sedation and general anaesthesia.

## How does consent work for children?

- ❖ Consent for children under 16 is driven primarily by their ability to understand the proposed treatment and give consent for it.
- ❖ It is important to quickly establish who is able to consent for the child for all other health needs e.g. their carer or local authority, which will cover dentistry as well.
- ❖ For children with no parental responsibility e.g. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the local authority looking after the child should be consulted.
- ❖ It is best to always bring documentation for the CLA when visiting the dentist.





## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about **NHS dental treatment**:

- ❖ Contact [an NHS dentist](#)
- ❖ Contact the Social Worker/Looked after children's team or Local Authority with regards to CLA dental referrals
- ❖ Access an NHS dentist by calling NHS 111

For more information on **dental health**:

- ❖ [Better Health](#) Advice on healthy living
- ❖ [Management of dental trauma/injury to mouth](#)
- ❖ **Smoking**  
To find your [local stop smoking service](#)
- ❖ **Alcohol**  
[NHS alcohol advice](#)  
[Drinkaware advice](#)

Photographic images taken from i-stock

### Acknowledgments

Thank you to the carers and guardians who have supported the drafting of this resource.