

1 minute guide: Oral Health

What does the EYFS say about Oral Health

Providers/childminders must promote the good health, including the oral health, of the children they look after

This has been included because good oral health habits need to be formed from the earliest age. Tooth decay is largely preventable, but it's still a serious problem among young children.

Why is poor oral health an issue?

Nationally, nearly a quarter of 5 year olds in England have tooth decay, with 3 or 4 teeth affected on average. In Doncaster, 25.4% of children aged 5 years old experience tooth decay, compared to the national average of 22.4% (OHID, 2024). The Children's Public Health team have been supporting settings to set up Toothbrushing clubs since 2016. We have brushing clubs established in both Early Years and Primary school settings.

Looking after children's oral health

There are several key steps practitioners, parents/carers can take to promote good oral health in children.

Cutting down on free sugars

- Limit the amount of free sugars children eat or drink in your setting, as well as how often they consume them.
- Avoid food and drinks containing free sugars before bedtime and overnight
- Water and milk are the only safe drinks to give children in regard to their oral health.

Drinking bottles and cups

- Introduce a baby to drinking from a cup or beaker from around 6 months
- From 12 months old onwards, encourage children to have all drinks in open-top cups
- When using a bottle or trainer cup, do not put anything in it other than breast milk, formula milk or water
- Avoid comfort sucking from a bottle on sweetened drinks as this causes tooth decay in young children
- Discourage parents from bringing juice in a bottle

Brushing teeth

- Encourage children to brush their teeth twice a day, including once just before bed
- Use a fluoride toothpaste that contains at least 1000 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride - use a smear of toothpaste for children under 3, and a pea sized amount for those aged 3 to 6
- It is not suggesting that settings need to carry out supervised toothbrushing, but this might be something that you wish to consider if you feel it would benefit the children in your care

How to promote good oral health in your setting

In practice, promoting good oral health includes:

- Talking to children about the effects of eating too many sweet things
- Promoting regular toothbrushing – twice a day for 2 minutes using a fluoride toothpaste
- Encouraging children to visit the dentist regularly (twice a year is recommended)
- Identify and support families with children with urgent dental care needs to access care.

- Ask on registration if the child is registered with a dentist and signpost to routine dental care services [Find a dentist - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)
- Encouraging parents to promote good oral health at home

Doncaster Supervised Toothbrushing Club

Toothbrushing clubs in Doncaster are currently funded by Public Health. The training provided is also free and completed virtually. Any enquiries please contact STBC@doncaster.gov.uk If you would like to start or restart or set up a toothbrushing club.

Activities which promote oral health in the setting may include-

- Dentist role play
- Practise tooth brushing on dolls and toy
- Brush model teeth
- Stories and discussion
- Visits with dentists
- Supervised tooth brushing programmes

Helping families get support for children's oral health

There are a number of ways you can help parents and carers promote good oral health at home. However, you should not offer individual or specific advice. Parents and carers must speak to healthcare professionals, like a dentist or member of the dental team, for medical advice. If a family has concerns about their child's oral health, signpost them to their dentist for further assessment and support. Local NHS dentists can be found on the NHS website [Find a dentist - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

If the child needs urgent dental care, and their dentist does not offer emergency appointments, parents and carers can contact NHS 111

Useful resources

[Oral health - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

This [toolkit by Public Health England](#) gives more information on how to set up supervised tooth brushing programmes.

This [Children's Oral Health healthcare e-learning](#) is aimed at parents, early years healthcare workers, teachers, nurses, GPs and the public.

The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry have created a series of [oral health videos for children](#), in partnership with Dr Ranj, Hey Duggee and CBeebies.

This [NHS video on baby bottles and cups](#) explains when to move babies from bottles to cups and why.

The [looking after your baby's teeth NHS page](#) explains how to brush and care for babies' and young children's teeth.

This BBC article explains key strategies for [showing a toddler how to brush their teeth](#).

This [healthy teeth video from HENRY](#) looks at what we can do to help children grow up with healthy teeth.

Dr Milad Shadrooh, known as The Singing Dentist, shares [advice and answers to common questions about taking care of children's teeth](#).

PACEY's [oral health advice](#) includes fact sheets for parents, and their [nutrition spotlight](#) encourages healthy eating habits.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities [oral health survey of 5 year old children 2022](#) and Public Health England's [oral health survey of 3 year old children 2020](#) include statistics about oral health in the early years.