

Victoria's peak dental body: RCH poll shines the spotlight on Victoria's growing oral health crisis



The new poll released by the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) last week has further highlighted significant problems with oral health in Australian children, again prompting concerns from the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) that not enough is being done to promote good oral health.

The RCH National Child Health Poll uncovered for the first time that one in three pre-schoolers have never visited a dentist and many well-meaning parents are confused about how to best to keep their child's teeth healthy.

The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) said that this poll highlights the growing oral health crisis affecting our children. Startling oral health figures show:

- One in three children suffer from tooth decay by the age of 6 years and two in five by the age of 12 years.
- More than 15,000 Victorians, including around 6,000 children, experience preventable hospital admission due to dental disease each year.
- A recent Deakin University study showed that over 50% of children in Australia's poorest demographics are consuming sugary drinks before their first birthday.
- The Australian Health Survey found that in 2011-2013, Australians were consuming an average of 60g of sugars each day, over double the WHO recommendation (25 g per day).
- Children and teenagers were most likely to exceed the recommendation with male teenagers consuming almost four times the recommended amount.

Dr Susan Wise, ADAVB President, said that many dental problems are preventable, and that establishing good oral health habits from a young age is essential.

"Parents should start cleaning their children's teeth as soon as they come into the mouth. It is important to brush teeth twice a day and make sure that you visit the dentist at least once a year for check-ups from the age of one. A healthy diet is the key to preventing tooth decay – choose tap water instead of sugary drinks and reduce snacks and other sugary foods. Starting these habits from a young age will put your child on the path a lifetime of good oral health," she said.

The ADAVB believes that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the importance of good oral health, given the strong links with dental disease and poor general health and wellbeing.

"We are starting to see the community change their attitudes towards added sugar in foods and drinks, but it is important that this is embraced with appropriate policies from government and industry", said Associate Professor Matt Hopcraft, ADAVB CEO.

"Whilst the ADAVB strongly supports a tax on sugary drinks, we think there are a range of measures that need to be addressed, such as restricting advertising and marketing of sugary foods and drinks

to children, removing sugary drinks from hospitals and sporting venues, and improving food labels to help parents make healthy food choices. The RCH poll provides further evidence to fuel this action and government and policy makers should stop the delay in taking steps to deal with this preventable and costly health issue.”

According to the RCH poll, infrequent tooth brushing, few dental visits, especially in toddlers and pre-schoolers, and a sugar-laden diet are all combining to set children up for a lifetime of poor oral health. This is reflected in the poor state of oral health in Australia, with 1 in 3 children experiencing tooth decay by 5-6 years of age, and more than 26,000 children admitted to hospitals to treat tooth decay.

The poll found that:

- One in three (31 per cent) pre-schoolers have never visited a dentist.
- One in four of all school-aged children (27 per cent), two in five pre-schoolers (39%) and more than half (58%) of infants and toddlers don't have their teeth brushed twice a day.
- One in four (23 per cent) parents hold the misbelief that children only need to see the dentist if they have a problem with their teeth.
- More than three quarters (77 per cent) of parents don't know that their children should see a dentist for their first check-up about age 12 months.
- Almost half of parents (48 per cent) don't know that tap water, which contains fluoride, is better for teeth than bottled water.
- Most parents (85 per cent) do not know the maximum recommended daily intake of added sugar for children.
- Half of parents (49%) do not know that there might be free dental services available for their child.

Media enquiries:

Media interviews are available with ADAVB President, Dr Susan Wise and ADAVB CEO, Associate Professor Matthew Hopcraft. Please contact:

Sophia Ljaskevic, Communications Manager ADAVB

Tel: 8825 4600 Email: sophia.ljaskevic@adavb.org

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