

## News Release

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### **Daily supervised toothbrushing in nurseries and schools can help to reduce school absences**

As the new school year begins, research by dental experts at the University of Glasgow reveals the wider health and social benefits of Scotland's Childsmile Supervised Daily Toothbrushing Programme in nurseries and schools.

To mark the findings, nursery and school staff across Scotland will receive a briefing, thanking them for their work delivering the Childsmile Daily Supervised Toothbrushing programme, and sharing evidence on how it has improved oral health among children, potentially helping to reduce dental-associated school absences.

The evidence comes from evaluation by the University of Glasgow showing the Childsmile programme has reduced childhood tooth decay across the population and saved on NHS treatment costs. Additionally, recent research by the same team found that the Daily Supervised Toothbrushing programme may also help to reduce the number of school absences due to dental issues.

The most recent University of Glasgow-led study, published in the [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#), found that children with tooth decay missed on average five more half-days per year than those with healthy teeth. Children needing emergency dental treatment or general anaesthetic missed six or more extra half-days.

The study also found that children living in the most socioeconomically deprived areas of Scotland have almost double the amount of school absences related to poor oral health compared with children living in the least deprived areas.

David Conway, Professor of Dental Public Health at the University of Glasgow's Dental School, and co-Director of the Childsmile programme added: "The findings support the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland Childsmile programme – especially supervised daily toothbrushing in nurseries and schools, which we have shown has driven child oral health improvement across Scotland.

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“Childsmile is a credit to the collaboration between health and education teams – including the dedicated work of the nursery and school staff delivering supervised daily toothbrushing. Not only can supervised daily toothbrushing improve children’s teeth it can potentially reduce school absences – giving both health and education benefits.”

Public Health Minister Jenni Minto said: “I welcome these findings on our flagship Childsmile programme from the University of Glasgow. We have led the way with child oral health through our continued investment in this programme.

“The programme offers universal oral health interventions, such as supervised toothbrushing and fluoride varnish application to children and young people in nurseries, early years schooling and dental practices.

“There are also targeted interventions for children living in the most deprived areas.

“The success of Childsmile is reflected in the latest official stats on child oral health which show that 73% of P1 children have no obvious tooth decay, compared to 58% in 2008 – when the programme was first introduced.”

The recent study was the first time the association between oral health and school absences had been evaluated using robust population-level data, from over 260,000 children (aged 4-7) in Scotland. Overall, the analysis showed 5 to 6.5 more school absences for children with poor oral health versus children with none.

In more detail, the study found that 33% of children had experience with tooth decay (average 16 part-day absences versus 11 for caries-free children); 9% had need for urgent dental treatment (average 19 absences); 2% required tooth extractions under general anaesthetic in hospital (average 20 absences).

Dr Mariel Goulart, Research Assistant at the University of Glasgow’s Dental School and lead of the research said: “Our study suggests there is a need to continue to address this area of public health in school children, with the research highlighting the need for integrating oral health initiatives within educational and public health policies to mitigate school absenteeism and address health inequalities.”

The study, ‘Poor child oral health and school absences: a population-wide data linkage study,’ is published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health.

**ENDS**



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