

Advancing Oral Health Awareness in School-Aged Children

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Key points:

- Introduction
- Importance
- Spreading Awareness
- Process of Tooth Decay
- Conclusion

Introduction

A child's smile reflects joy and serves as a window into overall health. Behind cheerful grins often lurk silent threats like cavities and gum disease. Each stage of dental development, from the eruption of the first milk tooth to the arrival of the permanent molars, plays a crucial role in overall well-being. Oral health remains one of the most neglected aspects of general health among school-aged children. Lack of awareness and inadequate access to dental care contribute to a growing crisis in pediatric oral health globally. The school environment offers a unique chance to instill lifelong dental habits in children who spend large parts of their formative years there.

This article explores the importance of oral health awareness in children and proactive steps that can transform smiles into symbols of lasting health. Ensuring good health and well-being amongst school-aged children is a global public health priority, and the contribution schools can make to this goal is increasingly recognized. The importance of peer influence in adolescence has also been linked with the use of peer educators for health improvement. Peer education interventions span a myriad of health-related topics, addressing mental health, physical well-being, and sexual health in a comprehensive manner. Such

programs often promote healthy lifestyle choices, including balanced nutrition and physical activity. They leverage peer influence to engage school-aged kids and adolescents effectively. These initiatives foster positive behavior and awareness.¹

The Importance of Oral Health Education in School-Aged Children

Many interventions play a vital role in comprehensive health education by equipping youngsters with the necessary knowledge and skills for long-term well-being.

Dental caries, commonly known as tooth decay, results from damage to the enamel of the teeth. It is one of the most prevalent oral health issues in school-aged children. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 60–90% of school going children worldwide suffer from dental caries, particularly in underdeveloped nations. While dental care is better managed in developed countries, the condition still requires attention to ensure early prevention.

Children with dental caries often experience discomfort that may interfere with routine activities such as playing, sleeping, and eating. The presence of dental pain or discomfort can also affect concentration in

school and hinder educational performance. If not identified and treated promptly, dental caries can lead to severe pain and infections. In advanced cases, costly restorative dental procedures may be required.

Early education about oral hygiene, regular dental screenings, and support from families and schools are key measures that can help prevent and manage dental caries, ultimately promoting healthier smiles and better overall well-being among children.²

Promoting Oral Health Awareness in Early Childhood

Children experience unnecessary discomfort from tooth decay, which limits their ability to eat, speak, and learn. The good news is that tooth decay is preventable with good oral hygiene, a proper diet, and regular biannual visits to the dentist for cleanings, fluoride treatments, and sealants. It is important for children to start learning about the value of a healthy mouth in preschool and early school grades.

Teeth help us eat, speak, sing, and smile. Healthy gums and bone support and hold teeth in place, while the cheeks, lips, and palate are essential for chewing and speaking. The tongue also plays a vital role in helping us speak and taste food. Baby teeth are important because they hold space in the jaw for permanent teeth developing under the gums. If baby teeth are extracted (removed) too early, permanent teeth may come in misaligned, which can lead to long-term dental problems.

The types of food children eat also affect their oral health. Sticky foods tend to cling to teeth and feed plaque, encouraging cavities, while crunchy foods can help clean teeth while chewing. When a toothbrush is not available after meals, rinsing with water can help wash away food particles and plaque (mouth germs), supporting better oral hygiene throughout the day.⁴

Process of Tooth Decay

- Plaque (mouth bacteria) around teeth use food particles to make acid.
- Frequent eating or snacking causes too many acid attacks.
- Acid attacks break down the enamel structure of the tooth leading to tooth decay
- Decay continues to spread deep into the tooth structure, causing a cavity (hole) if the decay process goes unchecked by a dentist.³

Conclusion

In general, the results showed good oral health knowledge among university students. However, it is important to emphasize that healthcare students and those whose family members work in the field of dental medicine have shown better knowledge. It was also confirmed that students with a higher knowledge score use oral hygiene aids more frequently like dental floss, interdental brushes, and mouth rinses. From all the above, it can be concluded that education on this topic is fundamental for understanding and maintaining of oral health.⁵

References

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