

Global warning



Rhea M Haugseth, President of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, discusses the challenge of reducing tooth decay among US children and the potential for global impact



No, that is not a typo. I am talking about a warning – sadly, the tooth decay rate of children ages two to five years-old is rising in the United States. I would venture a guess that it might be the same in the United Kingdom, and that this is turning into a global issue as more and more countries are emulating the United States and becoming more ‘westernised’. So why is this happening? We know that the tooth decay process is multifactorial, but for the sake of simplifying, let’s look at what changes we have seen in the United States over the past 10 years that could be contributing factors to this epidemic.

Today, children are frequent snackers that drink juices and other sugared beverages throughout the day. This constant exposure to acid’s harmful effects that the oral bacteria then produce, has led to an increase in decay in this very young segment of our patient population. This needs to be stopped – we collectively need to spread the word to parents and caregivers about the need for more healthy snacks and to use water as the drink of choice for these children.

Children need to be seen by a dentist by age one, thereby establishing a ‘Dental Home’. A Dental Home is defined as

the ongoing relationship between the dentist and the patient, inclusive of all aspects of oral healthcare delivered in a comprehensive, continuously accessible, coordinated, and family-centred way. This is a real opportunity to influence parental behaviours as it relates to the oral health of children. We know that dental disease is preventable – let’s share that information

“With dental decay on the rise in our young patients, we need to step up and really attack this trend”

with the parents and caregivers of our young patients. Guidance on oral hygiene, diet, non-nutritive sucking habits, fluoride needs, and injury prevention are just a few of the topics we need to do a better job of educating parents on.

With dental decay on the rise in our young patients, we need to step up and really attack this trend. We need to educate these children’s caregivers on prevention. We know that good oral hygiene at home, healthy snacks no more than three times a day, and any beverage

other than water should be limited to meal and snack times. We really need to reinforce that the use of water and only water to satisfy thirst throughout the day will help decrease decay rate in these vulnerable children.

So let’s help these parents and caregivers prevent oral disease in their children by educating them on prevention, providing them with the tools necessary to properly clean their children’s mouths, and showcasing good, nutritious, healthy food and beverage choices.

AAPD plans to use our influence in a way that will impact the children of our world in a very positive way. We welcome our international friends and colleagues to continue focusing our attention on oral health literacy that will make a profound difference in the lives of children we serve. ●

Rhea M Haugseth

DMD, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, President

www.aapd.org

The AAPD and RCSEd will hold the joint meeting ‘Doing the Best for Children: Are We Up to Date?’ on 1-3 September