



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 June 20

ORAL HEALTH MONTH APRIL 2013

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 083-13 re Oral Health Month 2013 be received for information.

Key Points

- In April 2013, the Health Unit collaborated with the London & District Dental Society to deliver an Oral Health Month campaign aimed at raising awareness about the importance of children having their first dental visit by their first birthday. Only 18% of parents surveyed were aware of this recommendation.
- Local physicians and a total of 195 partner agencies received posters recommending the first dental visit by the first birthday. All dentist members of the London & District Dental Society received information pamphlets to guide and assist them in working with infants and toddlers.

Background

April 2013 was National Oral Health Month. This event is celebrated annually by the health care community to promote good oral hygiene practices and to educate the public on the importance of good oral health. The London & District Dental Society (LDDS), a component society of the Ontario Dental Association, focused on preventing early childhood tooth decay through introducing young children to dental providers by their first birthday. The purpose of this Report is to inform the Board of the Health Unit's joint initiative with the LDDS for Oral Health Month 2013.

Tooth decay is one of the most common diseases of childhood. It is also preventable for the majority of children. Research suggests that education and preventive services targeted to young children and their families are very effective in reducing dental disease among school children. The Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Health Canada, and the Canadian Dental Association all recommend that children attend their first dental visit by 12 months of age to establish a "dental home", to educate parents/caregivers about oral health, and to deliver preventive services if necessary.

Oral Health Month Activities

Activities to promote the recommendation that children have their first dental visit by their first birthday were planned in collaboration with the Health Unit's Communication Team and the LDDS. There were three components:

1. **Research:** Parents attending the Thames Valley Neighbourhood Early Learning Program ((TVNELP) - a program for families whose children start kindergarten in the fall to connect them to community agencies to increase school readiness) completed surveys related to their children's oral hygiene habits and behaviours, and their own knowledge of the first dental visit by first birthday recommendation.

Between February 12 and May 22, 2013, 398 parents completed a survey while attending TVNELP sessions. The ages of their children ranged from six months to five years. Only 18% of parents reported that they were aware of the recommendation that children have their first dental visit by their first birthday. Nearly one-third (31%) of parents reported that their preschooler had not yet been seen by a dentist or dental hygienist. Among those whose children had been seen by a dental professional, the average age at the time of the first dental visit was two and a half years. Finally, 11% of parents reported that their child had been turned away from a dental office for being too young to be seen. These findings underscore the importance of continuing to increase awareness of the recommendation for children to have their first dental visit by their first birthday, and to support dental care providers in seeing infants and toddlers.

2. **Promotion to parents, partners, and other health care providers:** A poster recommending the first dental visit by first birthday was produced and distributed to 195 Health Unit partner agencies across London and Middlesex County. Agencies were asked to display the posters in high traffic areas where their clients and staff might notice them. An electronic version of the poster was sent to London-area health care workers via an e-mail distribution list. A copy of the poster can be found as [Appendix A](#).
3. **Promotion to local dental offices:** The LDDS produced and distributed resources for their member dentists that would guide and assist them in working with infants and toddlers. As part of these resources, copies of the Health Unit's brochure entitled *Preventing early childhood tooth decay* were distributed to the more than 200 dentist members of the LDDS.

Conclusion

Oral Health Month is an annual event to promote oral health and to educate the public and health care providers about important oral health issues. This year, the Health Unit collaborated with the London & District Dental Society to deliver a multi-faceted campaign to raise awareness about the importance of children having their first dental visit by their first birthday, and to support dental care providers in delivering services to young clients. These efforts will continue through the year.

This report was prepared by Dr. Maria van Harten, Dental Consultant; Dr. Chimere Okoronkwo, Manager, Oral Health Team; and Ms. Alison Locker, Epidemiologist, Oral Health, Communicable Disease and Sexual Health (OHCDSh).

Christopher Mackie, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and CEO

This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Child Health