

Supervised toothbrushing – Information for Early Years Teams

The government has invested £11 million, for the 2025-26 period, to support supervised toothbrushing programmes for children aged 3-5 years old living in the most deprived areas of England to help tackle tooth decay. The funding aims to support up to 600,000 children to undertake supervised toothbrushing and has been given to local councils who are responsible for the commissioning of oral health promotion programmes. Additionally, Colgate have agreed to provide 23 million toothbrushes and fluoride toothpaste over 5 years to support both supervised toothbrushing programmes and at-home brushing across England.

What is supervised toothbrushing?

Supervised toothbrushing supplements home-based toothbrushing undertaken by parents and carers. In early-years settings (schools, nurseries or childminders) children brush their own teeth with fluoride toothpaste (1,350 to 1,500ppm), with the activity overseen by early-years staff. The activity takes less than ten minutes and is undertaken at a convenient time as part of the daily timetable. Dental health is already part of the Early Years statutory requirements because of the impact tooth decay can have on young children's development, educational attendance and quality of life. Running a toothbrushing club is one way early years settings can show they are meeting this part of the curriculum.

There are lots of 'myths' circulating about children queuing for teachers to do the toothbrushing and schools needing to install lots of sinks. Many nurseries and schools use a 'dry brushing' approach without the use of water, or a sink. Children stand or sit while toothbrushing. After brushing, children spit excess toothpaste into a tissue or paper towel. [Excellent videos](#), like this one, demonstrate how quick and easy supervised toothbrushing can be.

Supervised toothbrushing in schools and nurseries isn't to replace toothbrushing at home. Parents still need to continue helping their children to brush their teeth twice a day. Last thing at night and another time during the day.

What are the benefits of supervised toothbrushing?

Fluoride toothpaste is proven to help strengthen teeth and prevent tooth decay. It is really important that children brush their teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste to have the best chance of protecting their teeth. The toothbrushing club aims to teach children how to brush their teeth as well as the once a day opportunity to brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste .

Supervised toothbrushing programmes have been found to be effective in reducing the prevalence and inequalities in tooth decay and are cost effective. Preventing tooth decay can stop children having to miss nursery or school for toothache or dental treatment and stops parents needing time off work too.

For every £1 spent on supervised toothbrushing programmes, there is an estimated return on investment for the NHS of £3 over a 5-year period.

[See here testimonies](#) from children, parents and early years staff about the benefits of supervised toothbrushing.

If you are working with schools and nurseries that would benefit from a supervised toothbrushing club but are not currently taking part please encourage them to take part.

Where can I find out more information?

The BRUSH research team from the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield have produced an evidence-based toolkit, www.supervisedtoothbrushing.com that has been accessed by over 19,000 visitors since its launch. This toolkit is a central repository of resources, clear protocols, step-by-step guides and top tips about supervised toothbrushing. It also includes [information on the effectiveness of supervised toothbrushing](#).

The Office for Health Improvement & Disparities has also published guidance on [Commissioning and delivering supervised toothbrushing schemes in early years and school settings](#).