

Oral health in children & young people in Wirral: a briefing

Produced by Wirral Public Health Team
January 2026



What is the impact of poor oral health in children and young people?

Poor oral health in children often results in negative consequences for children and families, for what is largely a preventable condition, these include:

- **Pain and Infection:** Tooth decay and other oral health problems can cause pain and infection, leading to discomfort and hindering daily activities
- **Missed School Days:** Toothaches, infections and appointments can lead to school absences, impacting academic progress and potentially disrupting learning
- **Impaired School Performance:** Absence from school, difficulty concentrating due to pain can impact academic performance and overall school readiness
- **Bullying:** Poor oral hygiene can be a factor in bullying, further impacting a child's well-being and mental health
- **Difficulty Eating and Sleeping:** Pain or dental issues can make it difficult for children to eat harder foods with different textures, can affect sleep and potentially affect their nutrition and overall well-being
- **Infections and Systemic Health:** Poor oral health can increase the risk of systemic infections, potentially leading to other health complications
- **Social Withdrawal and Self-consciousness:** Children with poor oral health may feel self-conscious about their appearance and withdraw from social situations

Children under the age of 7 should:

- Brush **twice** a day
- Use family **fluoride toothpaste** (1450ppm)

**Under 3
years of age**
a smear amount
of toothpaste

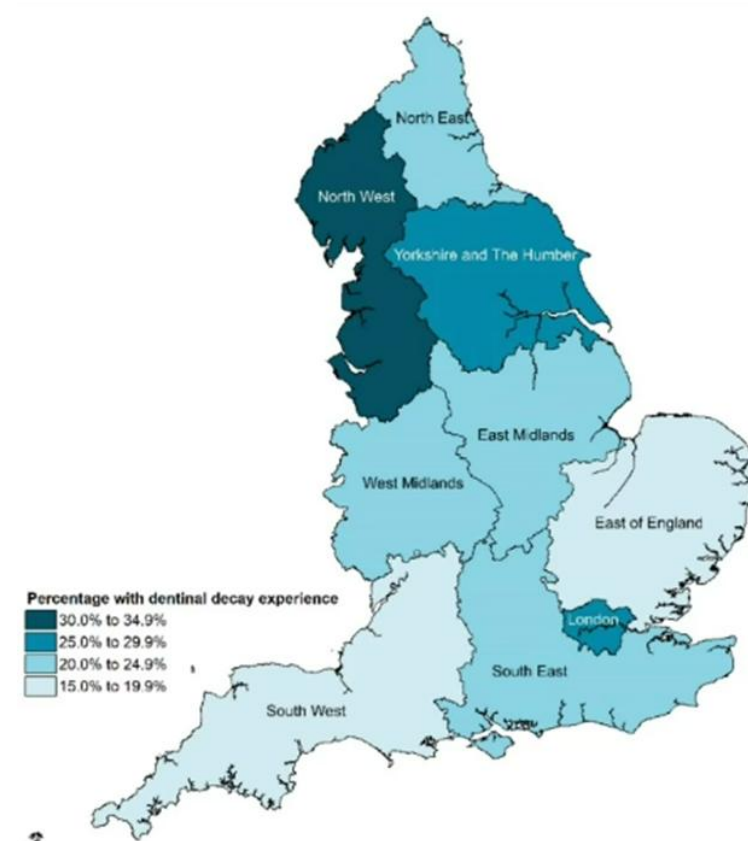
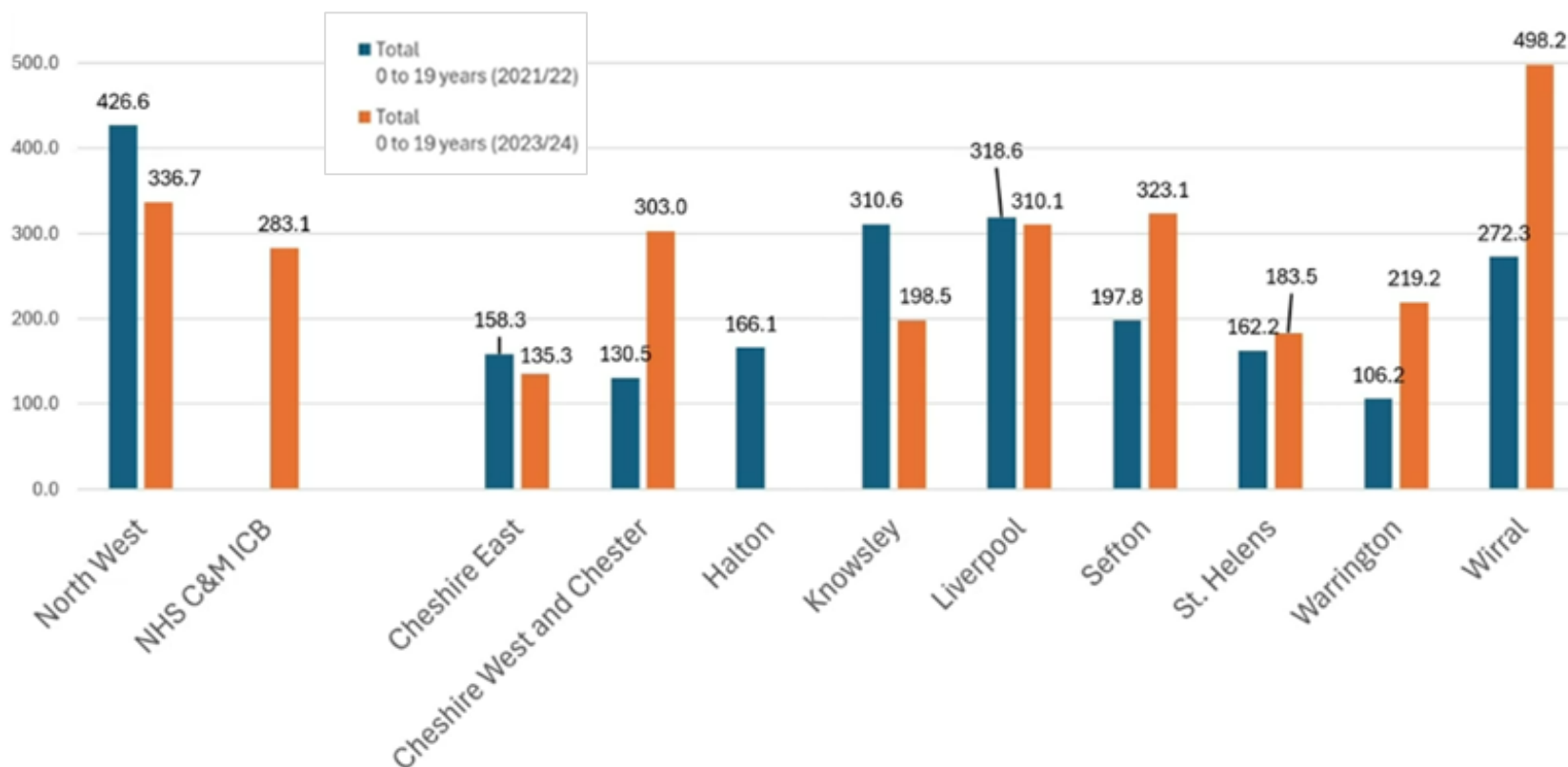


**3 years+
a pea-size
amount of
toothpaste**



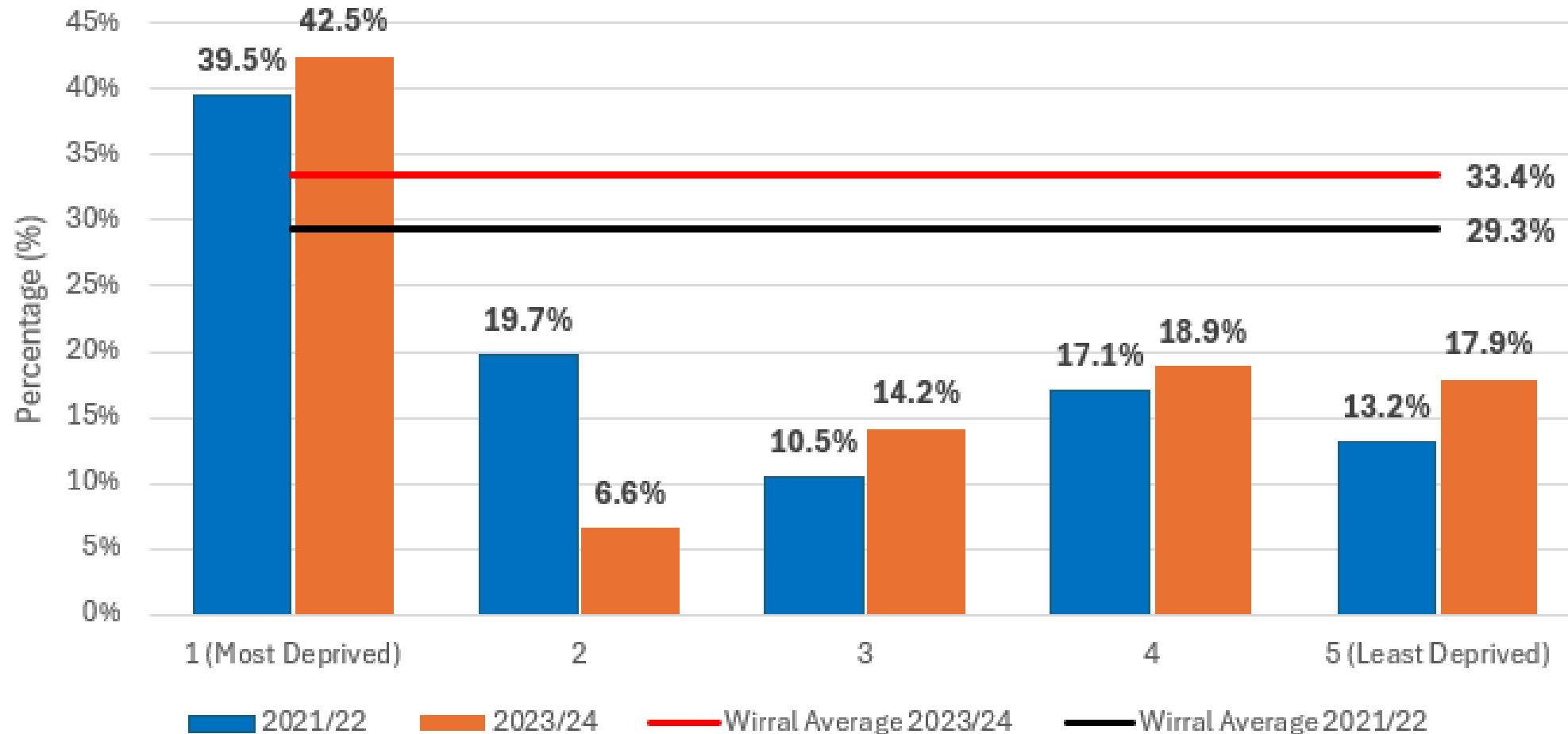
- **Spit don't rinse** after toothbrushing
- **Be supervised by an adult** while they brush their teeth

Locally and regional picture: Extractions and decay in children and young people aged 0-19



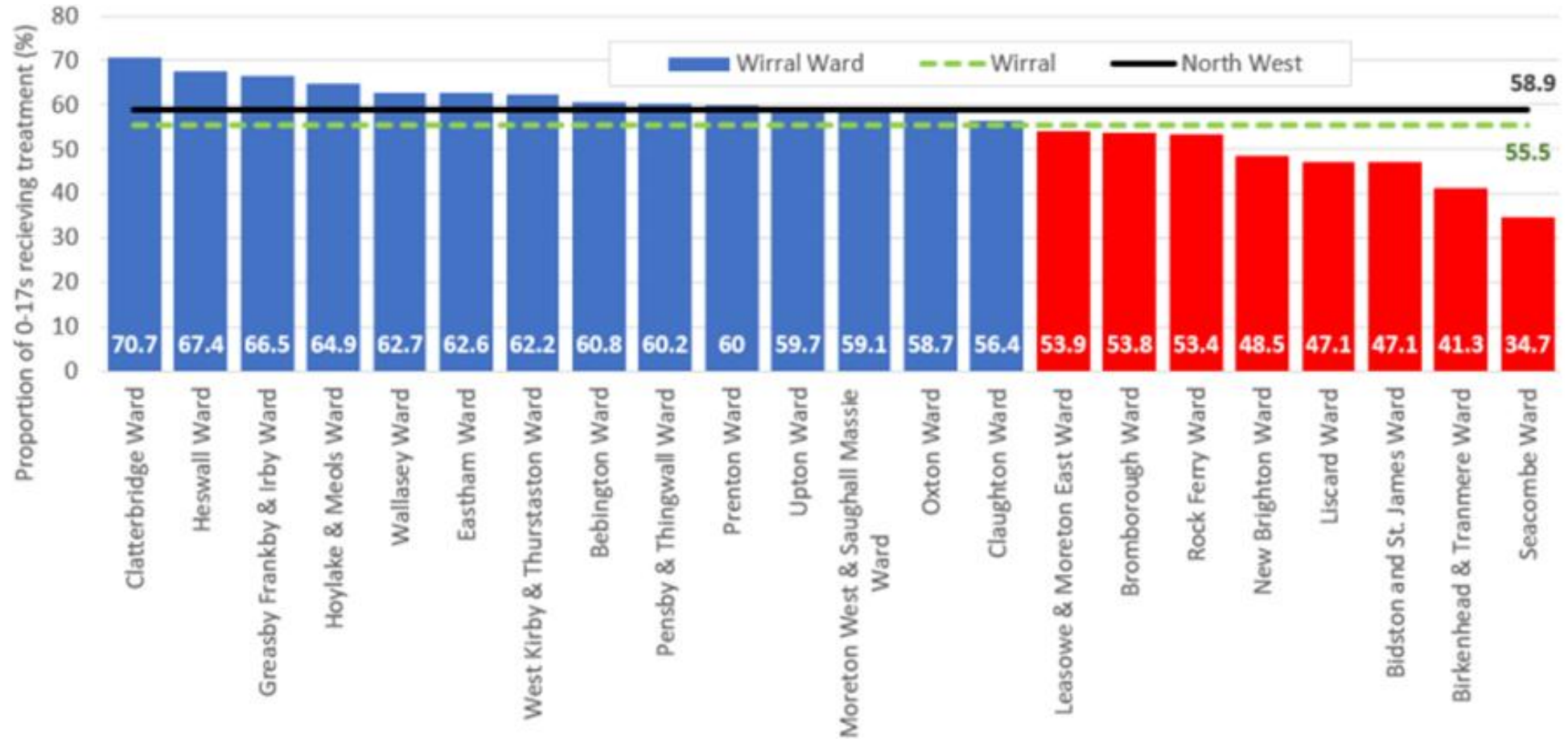
The chart above shows that in 2023/24, Wirral had the highest rates of tooth extraction in children and young people aged 0-19 in Cheshire and Merseyside, with a rate of 498.2 per 100,000; this is compared to an average of 336.7 per 100,000 in the North-West overall. **Tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admissions in children aged 5-9.**

Inequalities in dental decay in Wirral children



Data from the Public Health Epidemiology Programme for England (above) shows that poor oral health in children aged 5 is associated with inequalities and has worsened between the previous 2 surveys. Over one in three children in Wirral aged 5 had signs of obvious decay (33.4% in Wirral vs 29.3% in the previous survey), but this rose to 42.5% of children from the most deprived households (Quintile 1)

Proportion of 0-17s in Wirral who saw a dentist in 2022/23, by ward



In 2022/23, just over half (55.5%) of children aged 0-17 in Wirral saw a dentist (58.9% in the North-West), but ward level data shows this varied from 34.7% (or one in three children) in Seacombe to 70.7% in Clatterbridge ward. The 3 most deprived wards in Wirral have the lowest % of children who had seen a dentist in the previous year

Existing local oral health work

There is a considerable amount of work going on in Wirral and across Cheshire & Merseyside (C&M) on oral health in children, this includes;

- The [All Together Smiling](#) Programme (part of the wider [Beyond Programme](#) have taken a co-ordination role around oral health preventive work in C&M and have for example, funded 29,000 toothbrush/toothpaste packs for Wirral (Public Health colleagues have been distributing these to targeted early years settings in Wirral), facilitated training sessions for professionals, supported campaigns like National Smile Month, arranged visits by the Alder Hey mobile unit and raised the profile of oral health locally via targeted communications
- Organisations supplied with packs include Family Hubs, Wirral Foodbanks, nurseries, childminders and other early years settings, Women's Refuge's, dental practices, housing associations, CICs working with high need populations, children's wards at Arrowe Park, local Rainbows and Beavers groups, Wirral Libraries, Social care teams, Fostering support teams, WMO, Wirral Change
- Wirral Public Health Team are working with All Together Smiling team to implement **Supervised Toothbrushing** in early years settings in Wirral; Supervised Toothbrushing is an evidence-based approach to improving oral health in children and Public Health in Wirral have been approaching and recruiting early years settings in the areas of highest oral health need to take part

wirral**view**

All Together Smiling Roadshow comes to Birkenhead

03 June 2025



The event helped children learn more about keeping their teeth and gums healthy.

Children and families gathered at Brassey Gardens Children's Centre for an event promoting oral health during National Smile Month.



Accompanying information in packs

Brushing your Child's teeth the right way

Use **toothpaste** containing 1350 to 1500 ppm fluoride to prevent tooth decay.

Use a **smear** of toothpaste for children **under 3** and a **pea-size** amount of toothpaste for children **3 years and over**.

Brush for **2 minutes**.

Use a toothbrush with a **small to medium size head**.

Replace your child's old toothbrush **every 3 months**.

Cleaning your child's **teeth and gums twice every day is important**.

This can help you to:

1 Prevent **tooth decay**.

2 Prevent **gum disease**.

Brush your child's teeth **every morning**.

Brush your child's teeth last thing at night **before bed**.

Your child needs help with brushing their teeth until they are at least **7 years old**.

Looking after your Child's Gums and Teeth

Eat **tooth-friendly** and **sugar-free** snacks between meal times.

e.g veg and fruit (not dried fruit), cheese and nuts.

Avoid sugary drinks and snacks.

Water and milk are better for your child's teeth.

Visiting the Dentist ★ Final Reminders★

You should take your child to visit the dentist as soon as their **first tooth shows** or before the age of one.

Dental care is **free** for children **up to 18 years**, if you are pregnant and for new mothers **up to one year** after giving birth.

All children over the **age of 3 years** may be offered **fluoride varnish** to make their teeth stronger.

Need help taking care of your child's oral health ?

Visit your **Local Dentist** and ask for advice.

If you require urgent dental care contact **Cheshire & Merseyside Dental Helpline** on 0161 476 9651. Open 8am-10pm every day, including weekends and Bank Holidays.

If you do not have a dentist, call 111 or visit www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist



1 Use **family fluoride** toothpaste.

2 Brush **twice a day**.

3 Spit, **don't rinse or swallow** toothpaste, to keep the **fluoride on the teeth**.

4 Replace your child's toothbrush as soon as it gets out of shape.

5 Take your child to the dentist **regularly**.

For further information and advice in English and other languages use the QR code



Based on a leaflet produced by Birmingham City Council and supplied by AMS International. Reproduced and adapted by The Beyond Children & Young People Transformation Programme for our Cheshire & Merseyside All Together Smiling Programme.

NHS
Cheshire and Merseyside

As mentioned previously, the toothbrush and paste packs are part of a larger area of work across Cheshire & Merseyside co-ordinated by All Together Smiling (part of the Beyond Programme) in partnership with local areas – above shows the information leaflet which is included in the packs

Supervised Toothbrushing

- Supervised Toothbrushing has an excellent evidence base and has already been implemented in several areas of the UK (Scotland, Greater Manchester); the pilot areas in Cheshire & Merseyside were Halton & Knowsley
- It is not a substitute for home brushing and teachers do not brush children's teeth – it is designed to embed good habits early which will be carried on at home and throughout life
- Schools and early years settings are eligible if they are within areas of highest oral health need; training and all resources are provided (brushes, paste, brush 'buses' for storage)
- All eligible settings have received a message from Dave Bradburn (Director of Public Health) recommending participation and follow up to generate interest and signs ups continues



Animation explaining supervised toothbrushing



All Together Smiling have produced an animation explaining what Supervised Toothbrushing is, voiced by local children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6xOvcplzJE>

Links with HENRY in Wirral

- HENRY (Health, Exercise, and Nutrition for the Really Young) programme is an evidence-based way of working with families to enable them to make lasting, healthy changes, without judgement and with the understanding that every family is different; Wirral is currently part of an RCT (randomised controlled trial with University of York)
- We now have a 'bank' of trained facilitators delivering HENRY from several local organisations (e.g. Family Hubs, Public Health, NHS, VCF sector)
- HENRY covers oral health messages as part of the wider syllabus, meaning families who take part are receiving oral health messages
- The potential for HENRY courses or workshops is being explored with settings Public Health have worked with most recently on oral health (e.g. when distributing packs, recruiting for supervised toothbrushing or where staff have raised concerns about child oral health)
- For more information on HENRY in Wirral, email Public Health on: wirralpublichealth@wirral.gov.uk



Mobile Dental Unit Clinics

- National grant made available to be spent on oral health in 3-7s (same target age group as for supervised toothbrushing)
- Wirral already has supervised toothbrushing, significant number of free resources (brush/paste packs), HENRY programme and awareness raising/promotion; data showed some need around access remained however
- The aim of the mobile unit is to improve oral health among children and families living in areas of highest dental need in Wirral who do not currently have access to a dentist, via the provision of a targeted community mobile dental service
- Mobile unit will provide access to routine, preventive dental services and procedures evidenced to improve oral health (e.g. application of fluoride varnish, fissure sealants etc...) in children and families in Wirral
- A further aim is to reduce inequalities in the proportion of children and families able to access dental services in Wirral and reduce the rate of unscheduled dental care and attendances at GPs and/or A&E in children living in deprivation in Wirral
- 48 clinics scheduled to take place in Wirral from October 2025 to March 2027; at Family Hub locations in areas of highest oral health need in Wirral
- Monitoring and interim evaluation will be carried out to refine and improve



Free dental care for local children

Location	Seacombe Family Hub St. Pauls Road Seacombe
Date	Tue 28 th , Wed 29 th & Thu 30 th October 2025
Time	10am to 12 noon (appointments) 12 noon to 2pm (drop-in)

For more details about the drop-in dental service please contact

Seacombe Family Hub
On 0151 666 3506

This is a service for children who have no other access to dental care.



Awareness raising & training

- Numerous awareness raising sessions have taken place or are scheduled in Wirral focusing on oral health, e.g. Stay & Play and Big Cook, Little Cook sessions (existing sessions attended by Public Health Officers as they provided a good opportunities to speak with parents about sugar swaps, toothbrushing and the [Healthy Start](#) scheme) and HENRY oral health workshops
- Events and comms timed to coincide with National Smile Month (12 May-12 June 2025); supported by All Together Smiling, see right for summary of visit to Brassey Gardens
- The provision of the packs have provided many opportunities to raise the topic of oral health and facilitated the Public Health staff both making new contacts and revisiting existing contacts, to have conversations and raise the profile of oral health more widely
- The aim throughout has been to engage with settings, services and parents; conversations have led to gaining further insight into community need, creating new contacts, identifying settings and parents who may benefit from HENRY – as well as having conversations about oral health
- Training sessions for professionals facilitated by All Together Smiling (4 x 45 minute online webinars) took place during August and September 2024 which were well attended by Wirral professionals

Wirral – Brassey Gardens Children's Centre

Supported by Public Health and Fool Size Theatre colleagues.

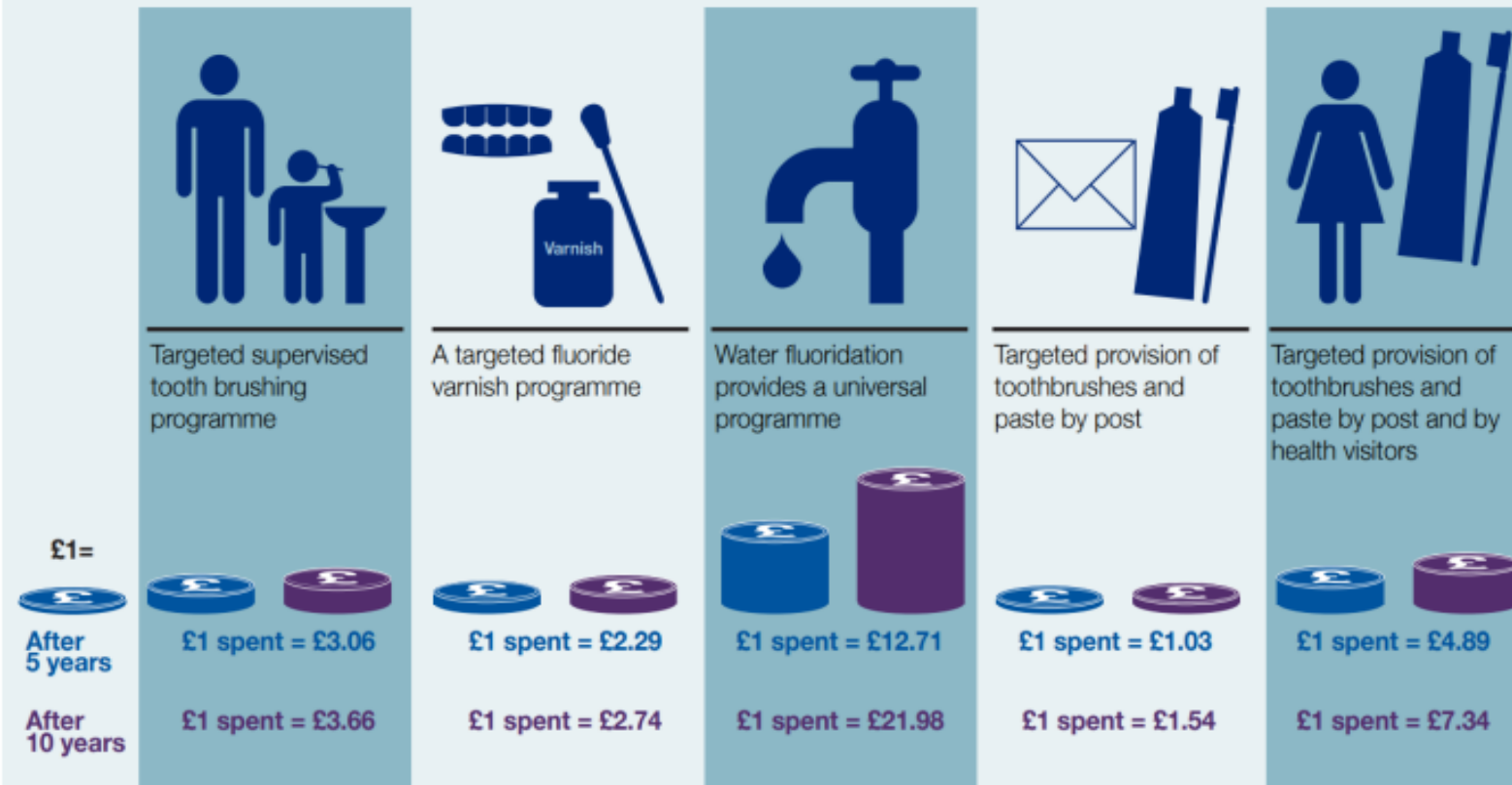
“The Wirral event has had a lot of good feedback from those who attended. The children enjoyed dancing with (and brushing the teeth of!) Croc-o-smile the crocodile and one little girl was particularly excited to create her own Peppa Pig cartoon about brushing their teeth! Parents/carers were shocked to see the amount of sugar in some of the day to day snacks and drinks that their families consume and will be looking to make some simple sugar swaps in the future.”

Stephanie Pink – Wirral Council Public Health team



Return on investment for oral health improvement programmes for 0-5s

Reviews of clinical effectiveness by NICE (PH55) and PHE (Commissioning Better Oral Health for Children and Young People, 2014) have found that the following programmes effectively reduced tooth decay in 5 year olds:



*All targeted programmes modelled on population decayed, missing or filled teeth (dmft) index of 2, and universal programme on dmft for England of 0.8. The modelling has used the PHE Return on Investment Tool for oral health interventions (PHE, 2016). The best available evidence has been used in this tool and where assumptions are made these have been clearly stated

Links and further info



- Wirral Family Hubs: [Wirral's Family Hubs | wirral.gov.uk](https://wirral.gov.uk)
- Wirral Family Toolbox (tips and tools for families in Wirral):
<https://familytoolbox.co.uk>
- List of upcoming HENRY courses in Wirral:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/o/henry-wirral-0-5-programmes-and-workshops-112587094241>
- All Together Smiling Programme website:
<https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/about/cheshire-and-merseyside-health-and-care-partnership/all-together-smiling/>
(including links to information in other languages under 'Resources for Families')

- [Best Start in Life: www.beststartinlife.gov.uk](https://www.beststartinlife.gov.uk)
- Best Start in Life oral health resources:
<https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/how-to-take-care-of-your-baby-or-toddlers-teeth/#food-and-drink-for-healthy-teeth>
- Public Health England: Inequalities in Oral Health in England (2021):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inequalities-in-oral-health-in-england>
- HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) Family Lifestyle support:
<https://www.henry.org.uk/>