

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH****Briefing note: Introduction of dental milk for primary school children****Why is dental health important?**

Poor dental health can have a significant impact on daily living. It can affect a child's ability to eat, speak and socialise. It can cause pain and sepsis, and loss of school time. Treatment can require hospitalisation and use of general anaesthesia.

Dental health of five year old children is an indicator included in the Public Health Outcomes Framework.

Dental health of children in Blackpool Council

The dental health of children in Blackpool is considerably worse than average.

A useful way of assessing dental health is to look at the number of decayed, missing and filled teeth. This is done routinely through dental surveys carried out every few years for five year olds and twelve year olds.

More than one in three five year olds (37%) in Blackpool has at least one decayed, missing or filled teeth (dmft). The average number of dmft amongst these children is 3.85. This is higher than the national average of 31% having an average of 3.45 dmft.

Almost half of twelve year olds (43%) in Blackpool have at least one decayed, missing or filled teeth (DMFT). The average number of DMFT these children have is 2.49. Again this is higher than the national average of 33.4% having an average 2.21 DMFT.

Approaches to improving children's dental health

The research evidence demonstrates that adding fluoride to the water supply is the most important population health measure for dental public health. Blackpool Council had previously agreed to support such an action but this is not currently achievable for operational reasons. Dental milk schemes, using milk fortified with fluoride, are widely accepted as the next best option if water fluoridation cannot be achieved. A universal approach to delivering the scheme is one of the few really effective ways of reducing inequalities and has been described as a way to "give poor kids rich kids teeth".

The introduction of a dental milk scheme within Blackpool would provide an important route for delivering fluoride, but is not the sole route and will complement existing work within the town to promote good oral health. There is a well-established Oral Health team in Blackpool delivering oral health promotion in schools and early-years settings including the Smile for Life campaign, as well as the provision of fluoride toothpaste by health visitors and broader work to promote healthy eating.

Key points on fluoridated milk

1. Freedom of choice

Fluoridated milk is offered universally to all children, unless parents indicate that they do not wish their child to receive the milk.

2. Fluoridated milk is not a medicine

The addition of sodium fluoride to milk is provided for under the 'REGULATION (EC) No 1925/2006 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the addition of vitamins and mineral and of certain other substances to foods' (with fluoride listed as a permitted mineral in ANNEX I and sodium fluoride listed as one of the permitted 'mineral substances' in ANNEX II).

3. Fluoridate milk is safe

Fluoridated milk is **safe**. It delivers a precise amount of fluoride to each child and there is no evidence of fluorosis of public health significant due to drinking fluoridated milk.

4. Fluoride compound

The fluoride compound used is sodium fluoride; British Pharmacopoeia (BP) standard.

5. Fluoridated milk is effective

The totality of research evidence, collected from world-wide data, shows that beyond reasonable doubt fluoridated milk is effective at reducing the incidence of dental decay in children.

6. WHO endorsement

The WHO recommends milk fluoridation. A WHO resolution made during the 60th World Health Assembly in Geneva, May 2007, urging member states to respond to a series of recommendations for the improvement of oral health including the administration of fluoride (which refers to milk as one of several vehicles).

Introducing a dental milk scheme for Blackpool

A Steering Group has met to scope the implementation of the scheme and oversee implementation, subject to agreement by the Health and Wellbeing Board. This group is led by a Public Health Specialist and includes Dental Public Health experts from Public Health England, representatives from the Borrow Foundation, an internationally renowned charity supporting milk fluoridation schemes, and Head of Catering from Blackpool Council's Leisure and Operation Services Department.

All primary school children in Blackpool are offered milk as part of the free school breakfast scheme. The process of adding fluoride to milk is straightforward and there is not expected to be any additional cost to offering dental milk. A number of dairies, including the current supplier, now have the capability to supply dental milk.

Recommendation:

The research evidence supporting the use of dental milk is well established and within Blackpool there is a mode of distribution already in place. Therefore the Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to approve the implementation of a dental milk scheme for primary school children in the town.