



ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FOR FAMILIES

# Oral Health

Better Start is committed to addressing oral health inequalities in Blackpool and working with communities to understand challenges and barriers and improve the oral health of our youngest children.

Better Start Early Years Oral Health Improvement work supports the wider Blackpool Oral Health Improvement Strategy, bringing together partners from across the sector. These partners include public health, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), health visiting, Family Hubs, and early years settings to address oral health inequalities for our youngest children in Blackpool.

The partnership has worked together to develop a holistic offer for families, professionals and wider communities to address practical challenges and barriers which families face when trying to access dental services. This is achieved whilst supporting behaviour change and the adoption of good oral health routines for the whole family and prevention of poor oral health.



Over the last year, we have formed a close partnership with Blackpool Better Start and worked hard at coming up with ways and ideas to improve Oral Health across the town. Through collaborative events, collating ideas, and communicating these effectively across our service, we now have a fantastic scheme in place which allows our families to refer their own pre-school children directly to a dentist.

Health Visitor



## Understanding the challenge

Poor oral health impacts on children and families. It affects children’s ability to speak, eat, smile and socialise and causes pain and infection, with days missed from school and parents work (OFHID, 2023). Data from 2011/2012 highlighted that the rates of Blackpool 5-year-olds with visual dental decay was 12% higher than the national average and by 2014/2015 this had risen to 17.7% higher.

This worrying trend was therefore identified as being an early priority for the partnership. Despite tooth decay being totally preventable, there is evidence that families that have socio-economic inequalities and live in areas of high deprivation are more likely to have lower levels of health literacy and may not be following recommended guidance around infant and child oral health.

Compounding the lack of awareness of good oral health practice the shortage of NHS dentists, and social barriers such as location, cost and fear which resulted in only a third of Blackpool children visiting dentists for routine preventative check-ups.

## What we did

Working closely with oral health leads, we reviewed areas of existing good practice and developed a model of support to provide consistent messages to all families from the earliest opportunity. These messages were shared through interactions with health, early education, social care, and universal services.

Work initially focused on establishing clear and consistent evidence-based messages - aligned with all-age messaging - around oral health for early years families, supporting behaviour change and the prevention of poor oral health. These messages were co-developed with community members and promoted through a series of communication campaigns on printed and digital media and through professional interactions with parents.



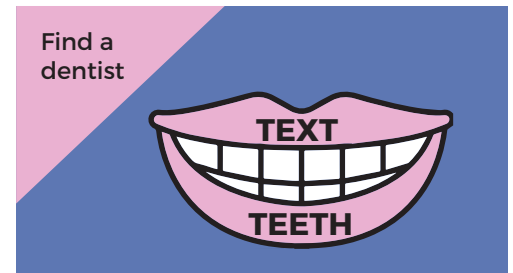
Blackpool Council’s Public Health Department has found it invaluable to work closely with Better Start colleagues to design and implement oral health programmes for our children aged 0-4, and their parents/carers. Their experience of working with Blackpool parents and early years settings has been vital to the success of these programmes.

Public Health Practitioner, Oral Health



## Changing Behaviours and Preventing Poor Oral Health

- Digital and printed messaging campaigns around good oral health practice.
- Distribution of toothpaste and toothbrushes through health visitors and opportunity to discuss preventative approaches oral health.
- Distribution toothpaste, toothbrushes and timers across the community via Community Connectors alongside consistent messages.
- Infant Feeding support to expectant and new parents includes messages around early oral health support.
- Supervised tooth brushing implemented across 57 nurseries, childminder settings and reception classes to promote oral health messages.
- Co-development of evidence based Oral Health Awareness Training for the Early Years workforce.
- Junior Healthier Choice Awards given to eat-in venues that offer families a safe and welcoming space for breast and bottle feeding, as well as providing free milk and water for young children.

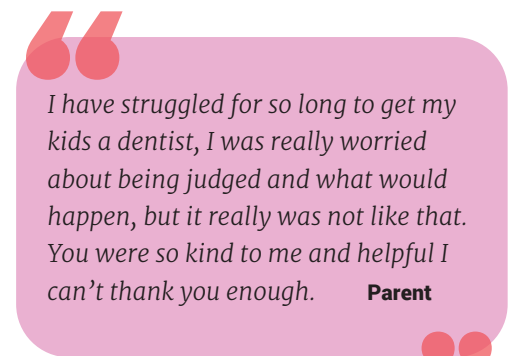


## Blackpool 0-5 Dental Access Pathway

Working closely with colleagues from the ICB over the last 2 years, the issue of access to dental services and care has been addressed. Using flexible funding arrangements, local dental practices have offered preventative appointments to families within community venues. Families are then offered further treatment and registered with participating dentists.

A simple referral pathway has been developed; our Text Teeth Pathway enables families to contact the community connectors through simply texting 'teeth'. The connector can then get in touch with the family, support engagement between parent and practice, and alleviate any concerns that the parent may have.

This dental access pilot paved the way for the £3.5m investment per annum for 5 years to support oral health and dental access for children living in deprived neighbourhoods. The ICB has used the learning from our work to develop the Paediatric Oral Health Treatment and Prevention Programme, a specific care pathway within the wider Dental Access and Oral Health Improvement Programme. The programme, which commenced in September 2024, offers children 0-5 who don't have a dentist, routine care sessions, along with an oral health behaviour change programme offered to parents and delivered in the practice, by trained dental nurses.



## Outcomes

### Decay Reduced

Between 2011/12 and 2021/22, 5-year-olds in Blackpool with visually obvious dental decay has reduced by 11%. This reduction is 10 times higher than the national average.

### High Attendance

Over 589 children have accessed preventative oral health checkups through the dental access pilot since January 2023.

### Provision of supplies

Over 18,000 toothbrushes, toothpastes, and timers have been given to early years families.

### Early Years Settings

Supervised toothbrushing delivered to over 8,000 children in early education settings..

### Prevention Saving

It is estimated that for every £1 spent on supervised toothbrushing, there is expected to be a £3 saving in treatment costs