

MEDIA RELEASE

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HAPPY TEETH, HAPPY KIDS: NUCOHS INTRODUCES FUN DENTAL EDUCATION THROUGH VISIT PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

The new initiative is part of the National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore's (NUCOHS) holistic approach to inculcate good oral hygiene habits early and elevate dental health amongst children

SINGAPORE — To parents with young children, it is no secret that maintaining good oral health of their little ones, from monitoring their diet to coaxing them in their daily brushing routines, can be a challenge. Most parents are also unaware that children should start visiting the dentist either from the time their first tooth erupts or when they turn one-year-old, and that certain foods, such as sugary health supplements, juice and even milk, can cause caries in children in the absence of good dental habits.

In Singapore, despite widespread access to quality healthcare, dental caries prevalence among children remains alarmingly high. Almost 50 per cent of children experience tooth decay by the age of six, with the majority (90 per cent) of these cases going untreated¹. In severe cases, this can result in hospitalisation or the need for dental procedures under general anaesthesia. Data from the Health Promotion Board shows a concerning increase in caries prevalence among 7-year-olds, rising from 48.1 per cent in 2010 to 53.1 per cent in 2016.

Between 2021 and 2023, NUCOHS has seen an average of 170 children below the age of seven each year, who require complex procedures carried out under general anaesthesia. This number has unfortunately remained consistent despite increased awareness among parents. Such complex procedures are done usually to address symptoms arising from dental caries, and include root canal treatments, dental crown procedures and extraction of more than one tooth in one setting.

Giving children a healthy start in oral care

On 16 September 2024, the Paediatric Dental Clinic at NUCOHS piloted its visit programme initiative by welcoming about 60 pre-school children aged four to six years old from The Schoolhouse Dover, along with their parents, to the NUCOHS premises, for an interactive hands-on educational session on oral health. This is a brand-new programme where NUCOHS partners preschools to organise quarterly visits, aimed at nurturing a positive association with dental visits amongst the young and helping them feel at ease with the dentist as a person they can trust.

¹ Shijia Hu, Wen Pui Bien Lai, Wanyi Lim and Ruixiang Yee. (2020). Recommending 1000 ppm fluoride toothpaste for caries prevention in children.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2010105820963291>

During the curated visits, parents and caregivers receive expert advice from NUCOHS clinicians on common dental issues and the appropriate ways to maintain their children's oral health. The young visitors also have the unique opportunity to step into the world of a dentist, explore the treatment room and various dental instruments, as well as learn the ins and outs of oral care through engaging games and stories. As a parting gift, each child receives a dental kit to embark on their personal oral care journey.

Dr Sim Chien Joo, Head of the Division of Paediatric Dentistry at NUCOHS, said: "Effective early prevention is crucial in significantly reducing severe tooth decay among young children. While individual preventive measures such as fluoride use and regular dental care are essential, their success hinge on comprehensive education directed at parents, caregivers and educators, coupled with diligent adherence to recommended oral health practices."

The visit programme is just one part of NUCOHS's ongoing efforts to raise public awareness of paediatric dentistry. Since 2014, the NUCOHS Paediatric Dental Clinic has started collaborating with the Department of Neonatology at the Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute at the National University Hospital (NUH) to reach out to young parents on infant oral health via bi-monthly sessions.

In January 2023, NUCOHS also launched an initiative to provide dental care to the patients of Viva-University Children's Cancer Centre, a one-stop cancer centre treating children with cancers at NUH. As a result of a weakened immunity system due to the nature of their medical treatments, these patients could be more susceptible to oral conditions such as mouth sores, dry mouth or even early-stage gum disease. Through bi-monthly clinics, the NUCOHS paediatric dental team provides personalised oral health guidance to patients and their caregivers, based on the child's age, therapies, and procedures they are receiving.

Dr Sim added: "The foundation of a lifetime of healthy teeth begins in childhood. Healthy teeth and gums contribute to overall well-being, affecting a child's ability to eat, speak and even smile confidently. At NUCOHS, we are mindful that good oral health care for the young encompasses a holistic approach that involves not only the child, but also the parents and educators. We are excited to expand our efforts through initiatives such as the visit programme, to educate and empower families in fostering a culture of preventive dental care and to place the child at a robust starting point in achieving healthier teeth into adulthood."

Chinese Glossary

National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore (NUCOHS)	新加坡国立大学口腔医学中心 (国大口腔医学中心)
NUCOHS Paediatric Dental Clinic	国大口腔医学中心小儿口腔诊所
Dr Sim Chien Joo Head, Division of Paediatric Dentistry National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore	沈倩如医生 小儿口腔科主任 国大口腔医学中心
Department of Neonatology Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute National University Hospital	新生儿科 邱德拔-国立大学儿童医疗中心 国立大学医院
Viva-University Children's Cancer Centre	Viva 国大儿童癌症中心

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About the National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore

The National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore (NUCOHS) is a national specialty centre that provides a comprehensive spectrum of dental care to manage oral, dental, and jaw-related conditions in patients across the lifespan. NUCOHS is also well poised to provide oral healthcare to the geriatric population as well as patients with special needs including those with complex medical conditions.

NUCOHS draws on the expertise of its clinicians and experts in the fields of Endodontics, Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, Orthodontics, Periodontics, Paediatric Dentistry and Prosthodontics, Geriatric Dentistry and Dental Public Health from the National University Hospital's (NUH) University Dental Cluster (UDC) and the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Dentistry to operate within NUHS under an academic health centre governance model. Its vision is to transform oral health in Singapore, nurture the next generation of oral health professionals, and champion impactful multi-disciplinary research in oral health.

NUCOHS is one of the three national centres, along with the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS) and the National University Heart Centre, Singapore (NUHCS), which form an integral part of the National University Health System (NUHS) in meeting the evolving specialised healthcare needs of the population in Singapore.

For more information, please visit: www.nucohs.com.sg