



Dental Health Week 2006

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN TEENS – HIGHEST RISK GROUP FOR DENTAL DECAY

Dentists believe that consumption of soft drinks, sports drinks and bottled water is contributing to a dangerous decline in the dental health of South Australian teens.

Latest figures available in South Australia show a 71.1% increase in permanent decay among 14-year-olds and a 71.7% increase in 15-year-olds over a 6 year period.*

The figures suggest a link between the number of obese and overweight teens and increased dental decay.

Dental decay and gum disease are the most common health conditions in Australia. Ironically, they are easily prevented.

Dr Bruce Noble, President of the Australian Dental Association (SA Branch), says that despite the implementation of water fluoridation across most of Australia, the increased consumption of non-fluoridated bottled water, sugary soft and sports drinks, and poor eating habits is causing an increase in dental decay rates.

“We know that there is an obesity epidemic in Australia. Poor eating habits and over consumption of fast foods and beverages are also contributing factors to increasing decay rates.”

“High acidic, sugary drinks such as carbonated soft drinks and sports drinks are likely to exacerbate both dental decay and/or dental erosion,” Dr Noble says.

Increased consumption of bottled water, particularly by teens, can also put them at greater risk of tooth decay because bottled water does not contain the fluoride which has been so successful in reducing decay.

“Fluoride in drinking water is essential to ensuring healthy teeth,” Dr Noble states. “It has been rated by the US Centers for Disease Control as one of the Top 10 public health achievements of the 20th Century.”

During Dental Health Week 2006, the Australian Dental Association Inc. (ADA) will be raising awareness amongst Australia’s teenagers about increasing decay rates and the need for dietary changes to manage this.

In addition to increasing decay rates, the ADA says that teens need to be aware of activities that can put their oral health at risk. Oral piercings and behaviours that contribute to dental erosion are particularly prevalent in this group.

Dental Erosion:

Dental erosion is the loss of tooth structure due to acids. Many beverages, as well as vomit and some illegal drugs can contribute to dental erosion.

Research indicates that boys aged 16-18 years get most of their energy source from consuming carbonated drinks. Current ABS data shows that almost 80 per cent of all 12 to 17-year-olds are

consuming soft drink every week. The ADA recommends limiting consumption of soft drinks, sports drinks and fruit juices due to their erosive effect.

Binge drinking, abuse of illegal drugs, chronic vomiting and eating disorders may also contribute to dental erosion.

Stomach acids from vomit have an erosive effect on teeth. Additionally, most alcoholic drinks have a high acid content and can also dry out the mouth (known as xerostomia), which contribute to erosion. Sufferers of eating disorders may damage their teeth both via induced vomiting and suffering from xerostomia.

Many illegal drugs are significant contributors to dental erosion. Both Cannabis and Ecstasy cause xerostomia, while methamphetamines and amphetamines have an acidic effect on teeth.

The ADA says that dental erosion can be minimised by:

- Limiting consumption of soft drinks, sports drinks and high sugar fruit juices.
- When consuming these beverages, avoid holding or swishing them around the mouth, ensure these beverages are cold as there is evidence that colder drinks do less damage. Also try to drink from a straw, which helps limit exposure to teeth.
- Avoid binge drinking and activity that causes vomiting.
- Drink fluoridated tap water as much as possible.
- Avoid brushing teeth straight after vomiting or straight after consuming acidic beverages.
- Maintain a good oral health routine – drink fluoridated tap water as much as possible to keep the mouth hydrated; after meals clean teeth with a soft bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste; floss and use a fluoridated mouth rinse daily; have regular dental check ups.

www.ada.org.au

For more information on Dental Health Week and the oral health issues affecting Australian teens, to request further media backgrounders on the impact of Diet on Oral Health, Oral Piercings and Dental Erosion or for an interview with an ADA spokesperson please contact:

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* Child Dental Health Survey, South Australia reports as published by the AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit at the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health.