Policy Statement 2.3.8 – Delivery of Oral Health: Special groups: Infants & Pre-School Children

Position Summary

All health professionals involved in treating children and pregnant women should be aware of oral health factors and refer to dentists as required. There must be adequate access to general anaesthesia facilities for preschool children.

All children should have a dental check-up by the time that their first tooth appears or by their first birthday and be regularly seen by a dentist from that age onwards. All health professionals involved in treating children and pregnant women should be aware of oral health factors and refer to dentists as required. Children should be able to access general anaesthetic facilities for dental treatment.

1. Background

1.1. Primary teeth, also known as baby teeth or deciduous teeth, begin to form five weeks after conception and, by the time a baby is born, all 20 primary teeth are usually present but un-erupted. These teeth begin to erupt at about six to nine months of age and it is important that healthy dietary habits are established before this age. A coordinated effort from all involved in the care of the infant and pre-school child is needed to ensure that optimal oral health is achieved for them.

1.2. Children with healthy teeth can chew food comfortably, learn to speak clearly and smile with confidence.

1.3. Healthy primary teeth are essential in the maintenance of space for the developing permanent teeth.

1.4. Oral health outcomes are improved by early assessment and intervention.

1.5. Positive early interactions with the dental team will encourage a lifetime of good dental habits and a positive attitude towards maintaining oral health.

1.6. There are indications that caries rates are increasing in Australian children.

1.7. There are significant numbers of potentially-preventable hospitalisations of pre-school children for dental treatment.

Definition

1.8. DENTAL PRACTITIONER is a person registered by the Board to provide dental care.

2. Position

2.1. Dental practitioners can advise parents and carers on issues such as:

- oral hygiene;
- diet
- appropriate bottle and breast feeding practices;
- symptomatic care during help with teething problems;
- prevention and management of dental injuries;
- habits which may influence normal growth and development of the teeth

2.2. Information on the appropriate use of fluorides should be discussed with parents/carers.
2.3. For children aged between 18 months and under six years, it is recommended to use only a pea-sized amount of low-fluoride toothpaste and avoid fluoride mouth rinses.

2.4. The support of all professionals involved in the care of infants and pre-school children should be enlisted in the dissemination of information regarding the maintenance of oral health.

2.5. Maternity and early childhood nurses should have access to information regarding oral hygiene, teething remedies, appropriate feeding practices, avoidance of disruption to normal growth patterns, prevention and management of dental trauma and the appropriate use of fluorides.

2.6. Day care, child-care centre and pre-school staff should be informed on all issues related to the development and maintenance of appropriate dietary and oral health guidelines for their facilities.

2.7. All health professionals involved in the care of infants and pre-school children should possess knowledge regarding their appropriate referral for oral care when required.

2.8. Governments, hospitals and day procedure centres should ensure access for children to general anaesthetic facilities for dental treatment where indicated and carried out by dentists.

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**Policy Statement 2.3.8**

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