

30,000 rotten teeth removed from children in hospitals, NHS data reveal

New data reveal a staggering number of tooth extractions for 0 to 19-year-olds in NHS hospitals, marking a distressing trend in childhood oral health.

Analysis by the Local Government Association of data published by the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) shows that last year 120 hospital operations to remove rotten teeth in children and young people every working day.

There were a total 47,581 extractions of multiple teeth in under-18s in England in 2022/23 at a cost of £64.3 million. Total numbers are up 17% on the previous year. The vast majority of these extractions are due to tooth decay, which is largely preventable.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, said: 'In the face of staggering oral health inequalities, it is disheartening to witness over 30,000 teeth being extracted due to tooth decay. It is a stark reminder of the persistent connection between dental health and deprivation.'

'Current data reveals a concerning truth – although the number of extractions is lower than pre-COVID levels, the lingering backlogs in the system obscure the real extent of the issue. This situation is unequivocally unacceptable, demanding immediate action. To combat childhood tooth decay, the implementation of preventive policies such as water fluoridation and comprehensive toothbrushing programmes is imperative.'

'The government must step up efforts to enhance dental access nationwide, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to receive routine dental care. It is time for a concerted effort to address this pressing public health concern and pave the way for a brighter, healthier future for our children.'

Geographical variations in decay-related tooth extraction rates are evident, with Yorkshire and the Humber reporting the highest rates (405 per 100,000 population of 0 to 19-year-olds) and the East Midlands the lowest (80 per 100,000 population of 0 to 19-year-olds).

Claire Stevens CBE, British Society of Paediatric Dentistry Spokesperson said:

'We are particularly concerned to see the data released on hospital extractions that show that vulnerable children in low socio-economic areas are approximately 50% more likely to require hospital extractions. However, it is important to note that the number of extractions cannot be used as a proxy measure for oral health. In this case the increase can also represent elective recovery post pandemic, which should be welcomed.'

'Ideally, we would see numbers increase, representing an increase in access then decrease as prevention takes effect. Right now, we have to focus on prevention. Children would not be in such a desperate state that they need a hospital extraction if we ALL accept that in this crisis in dentistry in the UK, children's oral health is everybody's business.'

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch added: 'The oral health gap is widening for our youngest patients, and it won't be halted by holding another consultation. Ministers are trying to turn supervised brushing into a political football. They need to grow up, and double down on tried-and-tested programmes. That means real commitment and ambition, comprehensively funded. So, the precise opposite of the plans we've seen this week.'

Dr Charlotte Eckhardt, Dean of the

Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, said: 'The latest figures are a sobering reminder of the prevalence of tooth decay, something which is largely preventable. The 17% jump in the number of episodes of decay-related tooth extractions in hospitals for 0 to 19-year-olds highlights the urgent need for improved access to NHS dentists. Given that tooth decay is largely preventable, it is shocking that tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admission in children aged between five and nine.'

'Children and young people should be encouraged to brush their teeth regularly with fluoride toothpaste, visit the dentist, and cut down on sugary foods that can lead to decay. The data lays bare the huge inequalities in dental care and enormous cost to the NHS, with decay-related tooth extraction episode rates for children and young people living in the most deprived communities nearly three and a half times that of those living in the most affluent communities. The Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) supports the expansion of targeted fluoridation to low socioeconomic areas and the introduction of supervised tooth brushing.'



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