



Health

Child tooth removal 'at crisis point', doctors warn

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Doctors are calling for urgent action to reduce the number of children needing to have rotten teeth removed under general anaesthetic in hospital.

Nearly 26,000 children, aged five to nine, were admitted to hospital in England in 2013-14, up 14% from 2011, with tooth decay.

The Royal College of Surgeons says many hospitals are reaching "crisis point" managing the number of children.

The government says children's dental health has improved in the past decade.

But Prof Nigel Hunt, dean of the Royal College of Surgeons' dental faculty, believes more needs to be done.

"It is absolutely intolerable that in this day and age, in a civilised country, children are having so many teeth out for decay, which is over 90% preventable.



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"We need to stop talking and have action to bring several bodies together - the Royal College of Surgeons, Public Health England, NHS England, government and industry to make sure we improve all aspects of oral health."

He also called for the amount of sugar in food and drink to be better labelled, greater education of parents and more money for research as to why certain ethnic groups and people in areas of social deprivation are less likely to visit a dentist.

'In pain'

A report by the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) published earlier this year showed tooth decay was the most common reason five to nine-year-olds were admitted to hospital.

Approximately 46,500 children and young people under 19 were admitted to hospital with tooth decay in 2013-14, with 25,812 in the five to nine age group, a 14% increase since 2010-11.

The report says there may be several reasons for this rise, including children not accessing a dentist until it is too late or more children not brushing their teeth properly.

The RCS says £30m was spent on hospital-based tooth extractions for children aged 18 years and under in 2012-13.

"Many hospitals are reaching crisis point in managing the number of children referred for a general anaesthetic for tooth decay," said Prof Hunt.

"Some people are having to wait over six months to access that service, some even up to a year in one particular centre. During that time that child will be in pain, suffering and perhaps having repeated antibiotics. All of this is unacceptable."

PA

A national dental health survey, carried out every 10 years and last published in May, found almost half of eight-year-olds have signs of decay in their milk teeth.

However it did report an overall reduction in the number of cavities in children's teeth over the last decade.

A Department of Health spokesman said: "Children's teeth are dramatically healthier than they were 10 years ago but it still needs to improve.

"We are radically changing NHS dentistry, so that dentists will be paid for keeping the nations' teeth healthy, rather than just for treating problems as they arise.

"NHS dentistry is free for children and we strongly recommend parents take children for regular check-ups."

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