

# Labour pledges toothbrushing scheme for three- to five-year-olds in schools <sup>[1]</sup>

Labour has pledged to bring in supervised toothbrushing in schools for three- to-five-year olds as part of a wider 'rescue plan for NHS dentistry', ahead of the party's conference in Liverpool.

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online via Nursery World [free account registration] <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

The scheme would be targeted at areas with the highest childhood tooth decay and aims to tackle the issue of the high numbers of children requiring operations to have rotting teeth removed.

Figures show that one in three children living in the most deprived areas of England suffer from tooth decay, and are three times more likely to have rotting teeth than children in the least deprived areas.

Tooth decay is the most common reason for children aged six-to-10 to be admitted to hospital.

Government statistics show that 42,000 children went to hospital to have teeth removed in 2021/22, 26,700 of whom had tooth decay as their main diagnosis.

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Professor Claire Stevens, British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD) spokesperson, said children's dental services were 'in crisis' and that it was 'a serious plan' for both the immediate crisis and the longterm.

'We must recognise that, through no fault of their own, some children need greater help to get the oral health start in life that every child deserves,' she said.

'We therefore welcome these measures as we know we need urgent action to address the persistent and immoral inequalities we see in children's oral health. Intervening with a targeted supervised toothbrushing scheme is proven to deliver beneficial oral health outcomes that also pay for themselves severalfold in the future.'

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NDNA's director of policy and communications, Jonathan Broadbery said, 'Moves to support young children's dental health are very welcome as healthy habits formed in a child's early years can make a difference that lasts a lifetime.

'Nurseries up and down the country already have a lot of good practice in place but the data shows more can be done. Targeted support to those in the most disadvantaged areas could help settings do even more for children's oral health. However, for early years settings to keep making a difference to children's development, learning and health and well-being, early education and care needs to be properly funded by any government.'

However, some teaching unions were more sceptical.

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'We have serious reservations about how such a policy could even work. It is not the role of teachers to be making sure children brush their teeth each day.

'Schools already play a role in teaching children about the importance of looking after their teeth through the curriculum, but there has to be a limit in terms of what we can expect them to do.'

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**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** children's health <sup>[4]</sup>

child wellbeing <sup>[5]</sup>

health and wellness <sup>[6]</sup>

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