

SA Dental Service 'Lift the Lip' Screening and Referral Tool for children aged 6 months – 5 years suffering decay (Early Childhood Caries)



SA Dental Service is implementing the Population Oral Health Project to address the current decline in children's oral health in South Australia. Good oral health is integral to overall health and wellbeing. Poor oral health causes pain, irritability, infections, loss of sleep, restlessness and poor nutrition. In addition, over 1,700 children aged 0-8 years were hospitalised during 2007-08 for dental extractions and restorations.

SA Dental Service is working with Practice Nurses, GPs and Children, Youth, and Women's Health Service Nurses to improve the early identification and referral of children suffering decay (Early Childhood Caries). A simple 'Lift the Lip' Screening and Referral Tool is available from SA Dental Service to assist with identifying children who have early signs of decay. Screening for tooth decay can be incorporated into general health appointments, when doing a visual examination of the throat or before doing the chicken pox immunisation due at 18 months.

Early signs of decay are easy to identify as it usually starts on the outer surfaces of the top front teeth. Screening for tooth decay involves simply lifting the top lip and checking the outer surfaces of the top front teeth.

Evidence shows that if identified early, preventive measures (such as the application of fluoride) are successful in preventing the progress of decay.

Children exhibiting early signs of decay may be referred to any SA Dental Service Clinic or a private dental practice. The referral form can be either faxed to 8222 9020, or posted in the reply paid envelopes provided.

The Lift the Lip Screening and Referral Tool may be used in the Medicare Healthy Kids Check, item number 709 and 711.

Once SA Dental Service receives the referral, the project team along with the SA Dental Service Clinic Staff ensure the child receives priority dental care at a clinic convenient to the family.

- **Children referred have a priority appointment**
- **There are no waiting lists for children accessing dental care at SA Dental Service Clinics**
- **All dental care is free for preschool children at SA Dental Service Clinics**
- **SA Dental Service recommends children have a dental check up at around 12 months**

SA Dental Service, together with GPs and nurses, are well positioned to engage more actively in oral health promotion and disease prevention. GPs and nurses can help ensure infants and young children receive the dental care they need.

SA Dental Service has a range of resources to support the project and are available at no cost. For more information about the project and resources, visit www.sadental.sa.gov.au (Health Promotion)

To order a 'Lift the Lip' Screening and Referral Tool please contact, Rachael Collins, Health Promotion Division, SA Dental Service, 8222 9015 or email rachael.collins@health.sa.gov.au