

## New data reveals alarming increase in number of children receiving dental treatment under general anaesthetic



An increasing number of Victorian children are requiring hospitalisation to treat preventable dental problems, with new data accessed by the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) revealing the devastating impact that poor oral health is having on vulnerable children.

Data obtained by the ADAVB under Freedom of Information shows that the number of children requiring a general anaesthetic for dental treatment provided through public dental services has dramatically increased. More than 2200 children aged 0-9 years required a general anaesthetic in 2017/18, an increase of 13 per cent over the past 12 months, and 39 per cent since 2013/14.

ADAVB President and public dentist Dr Kevin Morris said, "It is deeply concerning that over 2900 children aged 0-17 years required a general anaesthetic in 2017/ 18 to have more than 10,194 teeth extracted as well as thousands of fillings. Children aged 0-9 age years fared the worst, making up the majority (76 per cent) of cases, and accounting for an average of four teeth extracted per child."

"Some children as young as 2-3 years old are having all their baby teeth removed, leaving them without any teeth for years before their adult teeth come through. Baby teeth are very important. They enable children to chew food and speak properly, and they reserve the spaces in gum tissue for future adult teeth. You can only imagine the devastating impact these extractions have on their health and nutrition, and their social and emotional well-being," Dr Morris said.

Tooth decay is entirely preventable, with excess added sugar consumption a major contributing factor. Regular and early dental attendance is also important to help prevent dental disease

"We know that if children are being seen more often by a dentist then these problems can be addressed earlier and even prevented through supporting families with healthy messages. More than 2.5 million Victorians are eligible for public dental care but less than 400,000 receive treatment each year. Although public dental care is available for all Victorian children aged up to 12 years at

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little or no cost, less than 20 per cent of eligible children accessed public care in the past year,” said ADAVB CEO A/Prof Matthew Hopcraft.

“The relentless promotion and availability of sugary drinks to children including at sporting events and in community settings means that there is never really an escape from this decay causing messaging, “ he said.

On World Cavity-Free Future Day on Sunday 14 October, the ADAVB is highlighting the need to work together with government, community groups, health organisations, dental and other health professions to advocate for:

- An increase in public dental funding so that more families can access the care they need
- A shift in health system investment from treatment-focus to prevention-focus
- The removal of sugary drinks advertising and availability at children’s events and in community settings
- The ongoing promotion of the benefits of choosing water over sugar drinks and making this choice easier
- Improving food labelling to make healthy choices simpler.

## About World Cavity Free Future Day

- World Cavity-Free Future Day (WCFFDay), Sunday, 14 October 2018, is a worldwide oral health initiative led by the Alliance for a Cavity-Free Future (ACFF). Its mission is to address the need for greater global awareness of dental caries, the disease which, when left unaddressed, can lead to dental cavities.
- WCFFDay aims to engage communities around the world in this global campaign and offers the chance to send a ‘wakeup call’ to those with the ability to make social, economic and political changes to encourage action towards achieving a cavity-free future.
- This year, in Australia, the theme for the event is **choosing water** – the reason for this is that by simply choosing water over other sugary alternatives, Australians can help prevent dental cavities.
- Australians are encouraged to engage in conversations about dental decay prevention and share their challenge progress with other participants on Facebook and Instagram using the hashtag #WCFFDay.

## Media enquiries:

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