

New insight into tackling poor oral health in children around the globe

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A new research project from the University of Copenhagen has established an effective model for the fight against the escalating burden of tooth decay among children in Asia. The model is an important tool in breaking the social inequity in oral health of children.

In developing countries, the number of children who suffer pain and discomfort in addition to missing out on [school](#) lessons is increasing. This project demonstrates that the school is a vital key to better [oral health](#). The project also shows how it is possible to organize school oral health intervention, including health promotion and disease prevention for all, in a low-income country in Asia such as Thailand.

The research results are just published in the latest issue of the public health journal *Community Dental Health*

Oral health in Asia

The research project - based on the WHO Health Promoting Schools concept - focused on increasing the awareness of the importance of oral health among children, families, and schoolteachers in order to develop a healthy school environment, a healthy diet, regular dental care habits in young children and the use of effective fluoridated toothpaste.

Tooth decay is surprisingly high among schoolchildren in Thailand and primarily related to poor living conditions, the high intake of sugars,

weak traditions of oral hygiene, low exposure to fluoride for [disease prevention](#), as well as poor availability and accessibility of preventive dental health services.

"It is of vital importance that we learn more about the most effective ways of resolving the health problems, and this project emphasizes the necessity of engaging the school as well as family and schoolteachers", says lead researcher Professor Poul Erik Petersen, from the School of Dentistry, Department for Global Oral Health and Community Dentistry at the University of Copenhagen. "The results of the school programme are impressive with a reduction of 41% in new lesions of [tooth decay](#)."

The study was based on a community trial conducted in the Songkla Province in Thailand and involved fifteen schools with a total of 3,706 pre-school students. The two-year study assessed the benefits of an enhanced oral health promotion programme, which included closely supervised tooth brushing with an effective toothpaste containing 1,450 ppm fluoride, compared to customary oral hygiene procedures.

Future school health programmes

The results will hopefully assist Ministries of Health, public health administrators and oral health planners in low and middle-income countries in the Asian region in designing evidence based school health programmes. The experience gained from the research project could also offer new insight into the global fight against poor oral health in children.

"Globally, very few [school health](#) programmes are evaluated scientifically. This research project has provided sound information and will thus contribute to the promotion of preventive measures in school oral health programmes," Poul Erik Petersen concludes.

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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