

Dental Public Health activities of the
Preventive Oral Health Unit, Institute of Oral Health, Maharagama

The main objective of the Preventive Oral Health Unit (POHU), Institute of Oral Health, Maharagama is to prevent future occurrence of oral diseases among the people of Sri Lanka. There are many activities conducted by this unit in order to achieve this objective.

These activities include:

- Oral health promotion of pregnant mothers
- Oral health promotion of family members of the pregnant mothers
- Oral health promotion of children born to the pregnant mothers
- Oral health promotion of children under 3 years of age
- Oral health promotion of patients having higher risk of developing oral diseases

Oral health promotion of pregnant mothers

Improving oral health of pregnant mothers prevents complications of dental diseases during pregnancy, may reduce adverse pregnancy outcomes and has the potential to reduce the early childhood caries in their babies.

Oral health promotion during pregnancy has been incorporated into the existing National Maternal and Child Health Programme in Sri Lanka. Once the pregnant mothers are registered in the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) office of the respective area, they are referred to the closest dental clinic for the promotion of their oral health.

When the pregnant mothers are being referred to the POHU, their oral health care needs are assessed and treatments are provided accordingly. In addition, they are educated on maintaining their own oral health as well as on how to care the oral health of their children to be born. Special emphasis is paid to the prevention of transmitting the cariogenic bacteria to the newborn.



Oral health promotion of family members of the pregnant mothers

The pregnant mothers being treated at POHU are asked to bring their husbands and other children to the POHU for the promotion of their oral health. By improving the oral health of the whole family, it is thought that the transmission of cariogenic bacteria could be prevented.



Oral health promotion of children born to the pregnant mothers

The pregnant mothers are asked to bring their children after 6 months of birth. The objective of bringing them down at this age is to find out that the teeth are erupting and to reinforce the massages given to their mothers when they were pregnant. The mothers are instructed to start brushing their children's teeth as soon as they erupt. They are also educated on better dietary habits.

Mothers are asked to bring their children in 12 months to the baby to find out whether they are having initial white spot lesions. If these are present, mothers are instructed to pay more attention on preventing the progression of the disease. Children are again brought down to the clinic at 6 months interval to assess their oral health. The treatments are provided according to their needs.



Oral health promotion of children under 4 years of age

The Public Health Midwives are conducting clinics in the field to measure weights of children. Since these centers are close to the homes of the mothers, the participation rate is high. The POHU uses these weighing posts to promote oral health to the under 4 children. Staff from POHU attends these weighing posts on dates the clinics are being held and screen children less than 4 years. If they have dental caries, fluoride varnish is applied on their teeth on the same day. Lap to lap method is used in examining the children. These children are then referred to the POHU for further management. The mothers/ caregivers are educated on caring the oral health of the children.



Reduction of dental caries among 1-2 year olds by 43% - an achievement by the Preventive Oral Health Unit, IOH, Maharagama

The POHU conducted a field research covering all the 4 MOH areas in 2010 on the prevalence of early childhood caries (ECC) in 1-2 year olds (Ref: *Kumarihami SLM, Subasinghe LD, Jayasekara P, Kularatna SM, Palipana PD: The prevalence early childhood caries in 1-2 year olds in a semi-urban area in Sri Lanka. BMC Research Notes 2011, 4: 336-41*) and found that the prevalence of ECC was 32%. With the above mentioned activities, the POHU could bring down the prevalence of ECC among 1-2 year old children managed by POHU to 18% – a **43% reduction** in ECC level. By reducing the ECC level, we the POHU has save huge amount of to the government of Sri Lanka.

Oral health promotion of patients having higher risk of developing oral diseases



The POHU also provides oral health care services to those patients who are unable to carry out proper personal oral health care. The patients include differently-abled persons, deaf and blind persons and socially deprived institutionalized persons. The services including screening and treatments are provided at their own institutions. Another service provided by the POHU is the application of fissure sealants on first molar teeth of school children who are having higher caries risk. This project is done within their school.