



# Pharmacy teams supporting oral health

Oral diseases, particularly tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer, are among the most common and costly health problems experienced by Victorians. The good news is that these conditions are largely preventable, and as a pharmacist or member of a pharmacy team, you are well placed to promote good oral health behaviours.

## Oral health in Victoria

Tooth decay is the most prevalent disease in Victoria and dental conditions are the biggest cause of potentially preventable hospitalisations in children aged 0–9 year<sup>1</sup>. Gum disease is the fifth most common health problem and an average of 14 cases of oral cancer are diagnosed in Victoria each week<sup>1</sup>.

## As part of a pharmacy team, you can make a difference

Pharmacies are often the first point of contact for Australians seeking health information and advice. Evidence shows that approximately 80% of Australian pharmacists and 84% of pharmacy assistants are consulted for oral health advice up to five times per week<sup>2</sup>. This means that as part of a pharmacy team, you can play an important role by promoting good oral health messages and ensuring the community receives the right advice, products and referral.



The majority of Australian pharmacy staff provide oral health advice up to five times per week<sup>2</sup>

## Risk factors for oral disease

- Plaque on the teeth and gums and/or poor oral hygiene
- Lack of access to preventive effects of fluoride e.g. in toothpaste and drinking water
- High sugar diet (sugar in medications can contribute to dietary sugars)
- Dry mouth (a side effect of many medications)
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Diabetes
- Human papillomavirus (HPV).

## When to provide advice

As part of a pharmacy team, you can provide oral health advice while:

- Delivering programs that focus on diet, diabetes management, smoking and alcohol reduction.
- Dispensing medications that result in dry mouth.
- When assisting customers who are pregnant and/or with young children.
- Selling products such as toothbrushes, fluoridated toothpastes, feeding bottles, sippy cups and dummies.

## Key messages for good oral health

- Clean teeth along the gum line at least twice a day:
  - use a soft toothbrush
  - after 18 months of age, use an appropriate fluoride toothpaste
  - after brushing, spit out toothpaste, do not swallow it or rinse with water
- Drink plenty of water (preferably tap)
- Limit foods and drinks with added sugars
- If you smoke, consider quitting
- Limit alcohol intake
- Opt for sugar-free medication where possible
- Have regular dental check-ups.

## More information

Download and print oral health resources in multiple languages on the DHSV website:

[www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-advice/Professionals/oral-health-resources](http://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-advice/Professionals/oral-health-resources)

Access a range of oral health factsheets such as dry mouth, teeth and medication, and teeth and pregnancy on the Better Health Channel:

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mouth-and-teeth](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mouth-and-teeth)

## References

1. Victorian Government 2020, Victorian Action plan to prevent oral disease 2020–30, Department of Health, Melbourne.
2. Freeman, CR, Abdullah, N, Ford, PJ & Taing, M-W 2017, A national survey exploring oral healthcare service provision across Australian community pharmacies, BMJ Vol 7, no. 9.

## Referring to an oral health professional

Refer with any of these signs or symptoms:

- Pain
- Swollen, bleeding or receding gums
- Sensitive teeth
- Dry mouth
- Mouth ulcer or lump present for over 2 weeks
- Loose or migrating teeth
- Difficulty swallowing or opening mouth normally
- Difficulty eating or chewing with natural teeth or dentures.

We also recommend you refer:

- Children for a first dental check-up before age 2
- Women for a dental check during pregnancy
- People about to have major surgery or about to start certain medications e.g. oral or IV bisphosphonates, cancer treatment.

## How to refer

Refer customers to their regular dentist. If they don't have a regular dentist:

- Refer eligible customers to a local public dental service. To find out who is eligible and for clinic locations visit

[www.dhsv.org.au](http://www.dhsv.org.au)



OR

- Refer to private dentist. To find private dental services look:
  - Online at [www.whitepages.com.au](http://www.whitepages.com.au)
  - In the Yellow Pages under 'Dentists'
  - Via the Australian Dental Association (Victorian Branch) call 03 8825 4600 or visit [www.ada.org.au](http://www.ada.org.au) and use the 'Find a Dentist' search function.

## Emergency dental care

Emergency dental care is available to all Victorians through the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne and many community dental clinics which may be closer to home. In a dental emergency encourage customers to call 9341 1000 (Melbourne metro) or 1800 833 039 (outside Melbourne metro).

Telehealth services are also available from various hospitals and clinics across Victoria.