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To: Directors of Public Health  
for forwarding to Directors of Children's Services

24 August 2021

Dear Directors of Public Health and Directors of Children's Services,

## **Results of the 2019 national 5-year-old dental survey and notice of the 2021 to 2022 survey**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank local authorities, and particularly directors of public health, for their continued support for the National Dental Epidemiology Programme.

### **Results of the 2019 5-year-old dental survey**

On 19 March 2020 the National Dental Epidemiology Programme for England: Oral health survey of 5-year-old children 2019 was published<sup>i</sup>. The results showed 23% of 5-year-old children in England who participated in the survey had experience of dental decay. This was similar to the finding of the previous survey of 5-year olds in 2017. The areas with higher levels of decay tended to be in the more deprived local authority areas and marked inequalities were found within local authority areas.

The results highlight dental decay is still a significant public health problem. Toothache can cause pain, infection, difficulties with eating, sleeping and socialising and impact on school readiness and school absence. Extraction of teeth remains one of the most common reasons for children to be admitted to hospital.

The national surveys provide benchmarking data that may be used by local authorities in joint strategic needs assessments to both plan and commission oral health improvement interventions and evaluate them. The surveys also inform the commissioning of local services and national policy.

The 2019 survey had extremely high participation rates and many local authorities took the opportunity to commission larger samples than required for local planning and monitoring.

Local authorities have had responsibility for improving health and reducing inequalities, including oral health, since April 2013. Evidence informed documents to assist local authorities with improving oral health and commissioning decisions were published in 2014 by NICE<sup>ii</sup> and PHE<sup>iii</sup>. The PHE document specifically focuses on improving the oral health of children and young adults and PHE has published a return on investment modelling tool of population based oral health improvement programmes for children aged 0–5 years<sup>iv</sup>.

There are excellent examples across the country of local authority-led oral health improvement interventions and integration of oral health improvement into local policy, which were reported in May 2018<sup>v</sup>.

### **2021 to 2022 survey**

I would like to make you aware of this year's oral health survey of 5-year-old schoolchildren, which is taking place during the academic year 2021 to 2022. The survey was delayed last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is more important than ever that we get good participation in the survey this year to help us understand any impacts of the pandemic on children's oral health. This survey will use the same sampling frame as previous surveys to allow statistical comparison at local authority level. The surveys are currently the only measures we have of oral health at local authority geography and the national programme produces robust information, which is comparable across local authorities offering benchmarking and an overall national picture. The survey data also informs the Public Health Outcomes Framework dental indicator.

In response to requests made previously, modifications have been made to enable surveys of 5-year-old children attending special schools to be undertaken in parallel with this year's survey, where local decisions are made to commission this extra sample.

PHE is asking directors of public health to support local involvement in the 2021 to 2022 survey. PHE has dental epidemiology co-ordinators (consultants in dental public health) across England, based in PHE regions, who will advise throughout the process, including commissioning of these surveys.

It would be helpful if directors of public health could voice their support for this year's survey to directors of children's services and pass on their endorsement to head teachers of primary schools.

As PHE co-ordinates the National Dental Epidemiology Programme we are keen to hear how surveys can continue to respond to the needs of users so I would be happy to receive feedback.

Yours sincerely,



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<sup>i</sup> National Epidemiology Programme for England: [Oral health survey of 5-year-old children 2019](#)

<sup>ii</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. [Oral health: approaches for local authorities and their partners to improve the oral health of their communities](#). NICE guidelines [PH55] 2014 [cited 2016 Feb 9]

<sup>iii</sup> Public Health England. [Local authorities improving oral health: commissioning better oral health for children and young people. An evidence-informed toolkit for local authorities](#). 2014 [cited 2016 Feb 9]

<sup>iv</sup> Public Health England. [Return on investment of oral health interventions tool](#). 2016

<sup>v</sup> [Oral health improvement programmes commissioned by local authorities](#). 2017