To: Directors of public health
for forwarding to directors of children’s services

8 August 2019
Gateway number: GW-783

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

Request for your support for the 2019/20 national dental survey of three-year-old children

I write to seek your support in delivering the above survey, which is part of the rolling programme of nationally coordinated dental surveys designed to provide quality assured local information on dental needs. The findings will be made widely available and shared with you and your colleagues as commissioners of the surveys.

A three-year-old survey is taking place in response to the consultation exercise with local authorities on which population groups were of interest to them. The survey will measure the prevalence and severity of dental decay in three-year-old children attending child care sites in each local authority. The results of the survey will be compared with the findings of the previous survey of three-year-olds in 2013, which found 12% had dental decay with each child having on average three decayed teeth.

The survey will provide benchmarking data for use by local authorities in joint strategic needs assessments to plan and commission oral health improvement interventions and evaluate them. PHE centre consultants in dental public health can support local authorities with this and evidence informed documents to assist local authorities with improving oral health and commissioning decisions were published in 2014 by NICE and PHE. PHE has also published a return on investment modelling tool of population based oral health improvement programmes for children aged 0 to 5 years.

Results from previous dental surveys of children are encouraging but 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 is still the most common reason for children to be admitted to hospital.

PHE is asking directors of public health to support local involvement in the 2019/20 survey. Gaining good local support for the surveys will be key to enabling high consent rates for participation in the surveys by both child care sites and parents and carers of the children. This is essential for the survey results to be accurate and precise. The success of these surveys will be much increased if you could actively express your support to relevant colleagues, particularly heads of education and children and

1 Participation in the surveys is required by the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012: Part 4 Regulations,
early years services. This may be achieved, in part, by forwarding a copy of this letter to these colleagues.

PHE has dental epidemiology co-ordinators (consultants in dental public health) across England based in PHE centres who will advise during the whole process, including commissioning of these surveys.

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.

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

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

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