

PRESS RELEASE:

WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY - 20 MARCH 2018

SAY AHH – THINK MOUTH, THINK HEALTH

As defined by the FDI, 'Oral health is multi-faceted and includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence and without pain, discomfort and disease of the craniofacial complex'. Therefore good oral health is an essential component of one's general health and quality of life.

The global burden of oral disease remains a paradox, affecting 3.9 billion people worldwide.¹ Oral conditions, such as tooth decay (dental caries), gum disease and oral cancer, are among the most common and widespread diseases of humankind.² Dental caries in children is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever.²

Oral disease which is largely preventable remains a major public health problem, sharing common risk factors with non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are the leading cause of death around the world. Yet, the response to the burden of oral disease remains slow, with untreated tooth decay alone impacting almost half (44%) of the world's population.³ South African studies have shown that 60% of primary school children had dental caries, and 80% of the caries remains untreated.⁴⁻⁶ Left untreated dental caries results in pain, disability and a poor quality of life.⁷

Achieving optimal oral health thus constitutes a major public health challenge that requires strong advocates, who are committed to promoting oral health initiatives emphasizing disease prevention measures, and integrating oral health into general health and NCD policies.

What is WOHD?

Celebrated each year on the 20th of March, WOHD is the largest global awareness campaign on oral health. It was launched by FDI in 2007 and is the culmination of year-long activities dedicated to raising global awareness on the prevention and control of oral diseases. Each year, WOHD focuses on a specific theme and reaches out to the general public, oral health professionals and policymakers, who all have a role to play in helping reduce the disease burden.

Why is WOHD important?

As the largest global awareness campaign, WOHD brings to the fore the burden and consequence of oral disease, which is still not a priority issue in most countries and remains low on the global health and development agenda.

Moreover WOHD, emphasises the link between oral health and general health since poor oral health share common risk factors (tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets) and the same social determinants with most NCDs, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and gastrointestinal and pancreatic cancers. Therefore a comprehensive and integrated preventative and curative response would yield better results.

Despite the unacceptably high disease burden, oral health is still not considered a priority issue and has remained low on the global health and development agenda. With the recent adoption of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognizing health as a major prerequisite for addressing economic, social and environmental development, we are entering into a new era for global health. Now, more than ever there is an urgent need for global commitments from countries to address and integrate oral health into broader general health and NCD policies.

WOHD is a key date in the calendar that can be leveraged to promote the oral health agenda. It's an opportunity to put the spotlight on the immense burden caused by oral diseases and drive awareness among the general public, media and policymakers as well as call for integrated action. It is also a day to educate people to practice good oral hygiene habits and manage their risk factors, including adopting a healthy diet (one that is low in sugar), avoiding tobacco use and excessive alcohol consumption – all actions that will not only benefit oral health but help maintain general health and well-being.

The 2018 WOHD theme: 'Say Ahh'. The 2018 campaign sub-theme 'Think Mouth, Think Health' introduces the link between oral health as being an indicator of general health and well-being. The campaign aims to educate people that keeping a healthy mouth is crucial to keeping it functioning correctly and for maintaining overall health and quality of life.

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