

FOR NON-ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Basic Oral Health Examination

Background

A basic oral health examination is an assessment of the mouth, teeth, gums, and surrounding tissues to identify any potential dental problems or concerns. While comprehensive dental examinations should be conducted by dental professionals, non-dental professionals, such as teachers, caregivers and health workers, can perform basic oral health examinations to help the individuals in their care maintain good oral health and receive timely dental interventions when needed.

Basic oral health examinations by medical practitioners are crucial for detecting early signs of dental problems such as tooth decay, gum disease and oral lesions. Early detection and intervention can prevent these problems from worsening and help maintain overall health. Moreover, a basic oral health examination can reinforce the importance of proper oral hygiene routines and encourage individuals to seek professional dental care regularly.¹



Key components of oral health examinations

Other healthcare professionals should focus on the following key components when carrying out a basic oral health assessment:

- a. Lips: Examine the lips for any signs of swelling, bleeding, unusual discoloration¹ or suspicion of cleft lip. Healthy lips should be pink, smooth, and free of lesions.
- b. Gums: Check the gums for redness, swelling (bumps), bleeding or change in colour. Healthy gums should be firm, pink, and have a stippled texture.
- c. Teeth: Inspect the teeth for signs of decay, such as white/dark rough spots or holes. Presence of decay in teeth is a good predictor of future risk of decay. Check for missing, broken, or misaligned teeth. Evaluate if the teeth are clean and free of plaque and tartar build-up.
- d. Tongue: Observe the tongue for any swelling, discoloration including red spots/sores or white spots/sores or any ulcers or unusual texture. A healthy tongue should move freely and be pink, moist, and free of any lesions or coating.
- e. Cheeks: Examine the inner cheeks and the roof of the mouth for any lumps, ulcers, red spots/sores, white spots/sores or discoloration.
- f. Hard and soft palate: Examine the front and back roof of the mouth for any lumps, ulcers, red spots/sores, white spots/sores or discoloration.
- g. Breath: Assess the individual's breath for any persistent or unusual odours, which could indicate an oral health issue or infection.
- h. Pain: Ask about any concerns or pain coming from the teeth, gums, or any other part of the mouth.

Oral healthcare delivery framework

Ask

- Obtain consent from the individual or their guardian, as appropriate, before performing the basic oral health examination. Discuss any dental concerns or problems you may have noticed, as this can provide valuable information and help guide your examination. Make sure your country's regulations allow you to perform this examination.

Look

- Conduct a basic oral health examination by checking the key components (lips, breath, tongue, gums, cheeks and palate) using the provided checklist [Figure 1]. Wear disposable gloves and if available, use a dental mirror, a spoon, a spatula, or tongue depressor and a flashlight.

Decide

- Based on your observations and the individual's input, determine if there are any potential dental problems or concerns that require further attention or discussion. Identify areas where their oral hygiene routine may need improvement.

Act

- Address any issues identified during the examination by providing guidance on proper oral hygiene routines, recommending appropriate oral care products, or referring the individual to a dental professional for further evaluation and treatment.

Document

- Record the results of the basic oral health examination into the provided chart [Figure 1], or a chart suggested to you, including any concerns or problems identified, actions taken, and referrals made. Use this document to track the individual's oral health progress and help ensure they receive necessary follow-up care.

FIGURE 1

Component	Disease indicators	Healthy Indicators	Checklist of issues found	Note any concerns, actions taken or referrals made
Lips	Dryness, cracking, unusual discoloration, or lesions	Pink, smooth, free of lesions	<input type="checkbox"/> Dryness <input type="checkbox"/> Cracking <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual discoloration <input type="checkbox"/> Lesions	
Breath	Persistent or unusual odours	Fresh, free of persistent or unusual odours	<input type="checkbox"/> Unusual odour <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent odour	
Tongue	Swelling, discoloration, unusual texture, lesions, or coating	Pink, moist, free of lesions or coating	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesions <input type="checkbox"/> Coating <input type="checkbox"/> Swelling <input type="checkbox"/> Discoloration <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual texture	
Gums	Redness, swelling, bleeding	Firm, pink, stippled texture	<input type="checkbox"/> Bleeding <input type="checkbox"/> Redness, <input type="checkbox"/> Swelling	
Cheeks	Lumps, ulcers, or discoloration	Smooth, free of lumps, ulcers, and discoloration	<input type="checkbox"/> Discoloration <input type="checkbox"/> Lumps <input type="checkbox"/> Ulcers	
Hard and Soft Palate	Lumps, ulcers, or discoloration	Smooth, free of lumps, ulcers, and discoloration	<input type="checkbox"/> Discoloration <input type="checkbox"/> Lumps <input type="checkbox"/> Ulcers	
Teeth	Decay (dark spots or holes), missing, broken, or misaligned teeth, plaque and tartar build-up	Clean, intact, free of decay, and properly aligned	<input type="checkbox"/> Misaligned teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Plaque <input type="checkbox"/> Tartar build-up <input type="checkbox"/> Decay <input type="checkbox"/> Missing teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Broken teeth	

This factsheet is supported by:



References

1. Chalmers JM, King PL, Spencer AJ, Wright FA, Carter KD. The Oral Health Assessment Tool - validity and reliability. Aust Dent J. 2005 Sep;50(3):191-9. doi: 10.1111/j.1834-7819. 2005.tb00360. x.

Other Resources

1. FDI World Dental Federation. Educational module for other healthcare professionals. Available at: Educational Module for Other Healthcare Professionals | FDI (fdiworlddental.org) [Accessed on 29 April 2024].
2. FDI World Dental Federation. Consensus on tooth brushing. Available at: <https://www.fdiworlddental.org/consensus-toothbrushing> [Accessed on 6 May 2024].

Disclaimer:

This fact sheet offers general information and may require adaptation to suit the scope of work and regulations governing other healthcare professionals in each country.

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