

New dental scheme for kids

THE DETAILS

Assessment An assessment is undertaken at the start of the year to determine a child's eligibility for the schedule.

Qualify A child is qualified for the care if they are two to 17 years old, eligible for Medicare, a member of a family claiming family tax benefit A, or accessing youth allowance, Abstudy allowance, the disability support pension, parenting payments, special benefits, carer payments, a double orphan pension, the Veteran's Children Education Scheme if they are over 16, or the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme if they are over 16.

Covered Dental care covered includes examinations, x-rays, cleaning, fissure sealing, fillings, root canals and extractions, but does not include orthodontic or cosmetic dental work.

Eligibility To check if your child qualifies for the scheme, access your Medicare online account at www.my.gov.au or call 132 011.

By DAN HARRISON

More than 3 million children will be eligible for Medicare-funded dental care under a new scheme being implemented by the federal government.

The \$2.7 billion scheme is the final element of a dental package negotiated by the Greens with former prime minister Julia Gillard in return for their support for her minority government.

Under the scheme, families who receive Family Tax Benefit Part A will be eligible for \$1000 worth of Medicare-funded treatment over a two-year period.

About 3.4 million children between the ages of two and 17 are expected to benefit.

As opposition leader in January 2012, Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared it his "aspiration" to extend Medicare to cover dentistry.

Greens Senator Richard Di Natale used the launch of the children's dental scheme in January to challenge Mr Abbott to commit to a broader one.

Mr Abbott, addressing the National Press Club in 2012, said the big problem with Medicare was "that it supports treatment for every part of the body except the mouth".

As health minister in the



Free care ... children are the big winners of the new dental scheme.

Howard government, Mr Abbott in 2007 introduced a Medicare-funded dental scheme for sufferers of chronic disease.

The scheme was abolished by Labor to help fund the new one, but Senator Di Natale said the scheme was evidence of Mr Abbott's commitment to

including dental care in Medicare.

The Greens want Mr Abbott to implement their plan for Medicare-funded dental care for all Australians by 2018.

In the next stage, about 3 million pensioners and welfare recipients would be included in

2015, at a cost of \$1 billion a year. The full scheme would cost \$8.5 billion in 2018-19.

"We're challenging the Coalition to back up their rhetoric with a promise," Senator Di Natale said.

He said the Greens were open to negotiation on how such a scheme would be funded, and that while the party preferred it be paid for by a redesigned mining tax and by ending fossil fuel subsidies, it was prepared to consider an increase in the Medicare levy.

Senator Di Natale said universal dental care would deliver savings by preventing GP visits and emergency department presentations caused by untreated dental disease.

Health Minister Peter Dutton said the Coalition would like to improve dental care.

"There is a lot more the prime minister and I would like to do in dental but the level of debt we inherited from Labor is a nightmare," Mr Dutton said.

"The interest bill alone would pay three times over for a national dental scheme."

Labor frontbencher Shayne Neumann called on the government to quarantine the children's dental scheme from cuts being considered by the Commission of Audit.

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Prevention is better than cure

By the age of six, more than half of all Australian children will be suffering from tooth decay. It's also the most common reason for Australian pre-schoolers to be admitted to hospital.

There are two main factors behind this rotten statistic:

1. Children are consuming more sugary foods and drinks more often during the day.
2. Children (and adults) aren't cleaning their teeth correctly.

Studies have shown that more than 99 per cent of children brush their teeth with toothpaste, but this is giving them a false belief that they are looking after their teeth.

In reality, the time they take to brush is too short and the technique they use is wrong.

The bigger problem, however, is what we eat and drink.

The challenge is to get children to change their eating habits. Each time we eat, the sugars in food and drink are broken down by the bacteria in our mouths to form acid, which starts attacking teeth.

Half an hour after eating is

HOW TO BRUSH YOUR TEETH

- ☐ Brush for two to three minutes after breakfast and before bedtime.
- ☐ Use a pea-sized blob of fluoride toothpaste.
- ☐ Gently brush the inner surface of the teeth back and forth using short circular motions. Move to the outer

surface and then the chewing surface on top. Pay particular attention to where the tooth meets the gum.

- ☐ Use the tip of the brush to clean behind each front tooth - both top and bottom.
- ☐ Spit out toothpaste after brushing but don't rinse.

when teeth are at their weakest and most vulnerable.

If we don't eat anything else, the saliva goes to work to neutralise the acids and protect teeth. But, if we continue to snack throughout the day, particularly on sweet foods and fizzy drinks, we're constantly topping up the sugars that turn into acid.

Our teeth are under constant attack and saliva just can't cope with that level of acid and teeth will start to erode and decay.

The bottom line on eating habits is to eat fewer sugary foods and drinks and don't snack between meals.

Recent research shows

cheese is one of the healthiest snacks for your child's teeth.

In addition to providing large amounts of calcium, cheese also does its part to fight cavities.

Cheddar, Swiss and mozzarella all stimulate saliva glands to clear the mouth of debris. Saliva provides a strong protective film to the teeth and helps to wash away and neutralise the damaging acids.

Other good snacks are nuts and fruit (as long as you wash it down with some water straight after you've eaten).

When it comes to drinks, try and cut out all fizzy, sugary and sports drinks and drink tap water instead.

- #### Foods that cause tooth decay
- ✗ Lollies
 - ✗ Soft drinks
 - ✗ Cordials
 - ✗ Sports drinks
 - ✗ Fruit juices
 - ✗ Peanut butter
 - ✗ Potato chips
 - ✗ Savoury crackers
 - ✗ Popcorn
 - ✗ Fruit snack bars
 - ✗ Muesli bars
 - ✗ Sweet biscuits
 - ✗ Some breakfast cereals
 - ✗ Dried fruit

- #### Tooth-friendly foods
- ✓ Milk
 - ✓ Some cheeses
 - ✓ Fruits and vegetables
 - ✓ Nuts
 - ✓ Wholegrain cereals
 - ✓ Lean meats
 - ✓ Tap water
- 

REASON TO SMILE...

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