UK schools rank last in providing oral health education, survey of 13 countries says

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Geneva, 20 March 2019 – Today on World Oral Health Day (WOHD), FDI World Dental Federation (FDI) released the results of a survey from 13 countries, which asked parents with children aged 5–16 if their child’s school provided lessons on good oral care. Poor oral health can negatively affect how a young mouth develops and leads to more than 50 million school hours being lost each year. It can also affect a child’s confidence, social skills as well as potential for success later in life. Oral health is, therefore, essential to a child’s general health and well-being.

The survey reports that UK schools rank last in promoting good oral health. When asked if their child’s school provided lessons on the importance of good oral care, only 29% of parents from the UK said this was the case, which was dramatically lower than the results from 12 other countries. This puts the UK at the bottom of the list behind USA (53%), Australia (54%), Germany (69%), China (77%), Saudi Arabia (81%), Poland (84%), Morocco and Algeria (86%), Indonesia (87%), Brazil and India (91%), and Mexico (93%).

49% percent of parents from the UK also ‘didn’t know’ how often their child’s school gave lessons on good oral care, with parents from Australia and the USA not that far behind at 35% and 32%, respectively. This was in stark contrast to the results from Germany (19%), Saudi Arabia (12%), Poland (10%), China, Indonesia and Morocco (9%), Algeria (6%), India (5%), Brazil (3%) and Mexico (1%).

FDI President Dr Kathryn Kell said, “The survey results show that not all parents know if their children are receiving oral health education at school. We must fill this knowledge gap, as oral diseases are the most prevalent disease globally and affect 3.58 billion people; equivalent to half of the world’s population. What’s more, 486 million children suffer from tooth decay of primary teeth, which can cause premature tooth loss, pain, sleep disruption, problems eating and other health issues for young children.” She emphasized that “Schools must be encouraged to teach children about good oral care”.

The good news is that 71% of parents across all countries agreed that schools should teach children about good oral care and 51% also recognized that parents play a role in oral health education.

WOHD Task Team Chair Dr Edoardo Cavalle stated, “Good oral health habits start early, and we need to encourage children to brush their teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and help them avoid foods and drinks high in sugars. We also need to prioritize regular dental check-ups. Millions of school days are lost each year because of poor oral health, seriously affecting a child’s ability to perform at school. Together, parents and teachers must play a key role in helping to educate children on the importance of keeping a healthy mouth and teeth, which will help secure the general health and well-being of future generations.”

In response to the survey findings and to help teachers and parents Act On Mouth Health, FDI has developed Mouth Heroes for schools, a multimedia teaching resource that provides tools to deliver engaging lessons about the importance of good oral health. Aimed at children aged 5–9 years, Mouth Heroes features a child-friendly spokesperson called ‘Toothie’, who takes children on an exciting journey to develop health-
related life skills. By assisting teachers to integrate oral health into lessons, *Mouth Heroes* can help drive positive change. In addition, there are many resources available through the WOHD campaign website to assist parents in learning about good oral health practices for their children.

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**About World Oral Health Day**
Celebrated annually on 20 March, World Oral Health Day (WOHD) was launched by FDI World Dental Federation to raise global awareness on the prevention and control of oral diseases.

[www.worldoralhealthday.org](http://www.worldoralhealthday.org); #WOHD19 #SayAhh

WOHD Global Partners: Henry Schein, Philips Sonicare, Unilever; and WOHD Supporters: 3M, Planmeca, Wrigley

**References**

**About the Survey**
All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 16,477 adults of which 4,367 were parents with children aged 5-16. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18th February – 4th March. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults (aged 18+) in Australia, Brazil, Germany, UK, USA, Mexico and Poland and are weighted and representative of all adults online (aged 18+) in Algeria, China, India, Indonesia, Morocco and Saudi Arabia.