

Opportunities to Support Oral Health within Clinical Practice

Attention: Physicians, Community Health Centres, Walk-In Urgent Care Clinics, Nurse Practitioners, Family Health Teams, Ontario Health Teams, Ontario Health Central, Indigenous Health Care and & Community

Date: April 29, 2026

April is Oral Health Month, an opportunity to recognize the critical connection between oral health and overall health, and the important role healthcare providers play in prevention, early identification, and referral. In Simcoe Muskoka, preventable oral disease continues to affect infants, children, seniors, and individuals of all ages facing barriers to dental care. Integrating brief oral health messaging into routine clinical interactions can have a lasting impact on health outcomes and social-emotional wellbeing.

Key Oral Health Messages for Clinical Practice

Physicians, nurses, and allied healthcare professionals are encouraged to reinforce the following evidence-based recommendations when interacting with patients and caregivers:

1. Promote Early Dental Visits

- Advise parents and caregivers that a child's first dental visit should occur by age one, or within six months of the first tooth erupting.
- Early visits focus on prevention, oral health education, and early identification of concerns, not just treatment.
- Reinforce that dental care is a routine and essential part of early childhood development.

2. Address the "They're Just Baby Teeth" Misconception

- Many caregivers believe primary teeth are unimportant because they will fall out. This is a misconception.
- Healthy baby teeth are essential for:
 - Proper chewing and nutrition
 - Speech development
 - Guiding the alignment of permanent teeth
 - Preventing pain, infection, and missed school days
- Untreated decay in primary teeth can lead to infection, affect growth and learning, and increase the risk of decay in adult teeth.

3. Include Oral Health in Clinical Assessments

- When assessing patients, particularly children or individuals presenting with respiratory illness, recurrent infections, or chronic conditions, consider a brief visual check of the mouth and teeth.



- Oral inflammation, infection, or poor hygiene may contribute to or worsen systemic and respiratory conditions.
- Prompt referral to dental care should be encouraged when concerns are identified.

4. Support Seniors' Access to Dental Care

Good oral health is essential to overall health, quality of life, and healthy aging:

- Many seniors face barriers to dental care, including cost, mobility challenges, and limited awareness of available supports.
- Poor oral health is linked to chronic and acute conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, malnutrition, and respiratory infections, and can contribute to oral pain, social isolation, and reduced independence. Dental care is an important part of promoting overall health and well-being for seniors.

5. Connect Patients to Publicly Funded Dental Programs

- For patients who may face cost barriers, encourage them to contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. In Ontario, public health units administer publicly funded dental programs (such as Healthy Smiles Ontario & the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program) that provide FREE preventive and treatment services for eligible children, youth, and seniors. **Families can self-refer by contacting the health unit directly at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. 8804.**
- The Canadian Dental Care Plan is a publicly funded federal program that helps lower the cost of dental care for eligible Canadians. SMDHU does not provide services under this plan, but some private dental practices do.

Working Together

By reinforcing consistent oral health messages across healthcare settings, we can help reduce inequities and support better health outcomes for families in Simcoe and Muskoka communities.

For more information on oral health and what to look for during your patient interactions, along with publicly funded dental programs, please visit the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's [Oral Health page for health professionals](#).