

71st World Health Assembly (WHA71)

Agenda item 12.6: Maternal, infant and young child nutrition (Document A71/22)

FDI World Dental Federation is the official representative body of over one million dentists worldwide.

Despite the progress made, we believe there needs to be a more concerted effort to address oral health in the implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition.

As for Target 3 (low birth weight): pregnant women experience hormonal changes that affect their gums, making them more prone to periodontal diseases including gingivitis and periodontitis. If left untreated, it results in destruction of tooth-supporting tissues and ultimately tooth loss. Periodontal diseases may also be associated with an increased risk for preterm and low-birth-weight babies. We call on Member States to increase the availability and access to oral health services within maternal health services.

Turning to Target 4 (overweight): sugar is a major contributor to obesity and is the primary cause of dental caries (tooth decay). Dental caries is the most common chronic childhood disease – affecting up to 90% of school-age children worldwide. We therefore strongly encourage Member States to consult WHO's guideline on sugar intake for adults and children as well as FDI's practical guide on sugars and dental caries, and to implement meaningful interventions which can significantly reduce sugar intake for children.

We also urge Member States to strengthen legislation on the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. Breast-milk substitutes that contain free sugars increase the risk of developing early childhood caries (ECC). ECC is caused by frequent and prolonged exposure of the teeth to sugar and is often the result of a child going to bed with a bottle of a sweetened drink, such as a sweetened breast-milk substitute, or drinking at will from a bottle during the day. Product reformulation and tougher legislation on the marketing of substitutes containing free sugars will improve oral health outcomes and help reduce childhood obesity rates.