Luton Pop-Up Dental Clinics 2025

Creating Healthier Smiles and Reducing Inequalities

Why Is This Project Needed?

Across England, tooth decay remains the leading cause of hospital admissions for children aged 5 to 9. In 2023/2024 alone, 19,381 children in this age group were hospitalised for tooth decay, compared to 12,283 cases for acute tonsillitis. These figures highlight the impact of poor oral health on young lives, with the problem disproportionately affecting children in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation.
In Luton, childhood tooth decay rates are significantly above average. Many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have never visited a dentist and suffer from untreated tooth decay.

The 'Covid' Generation
In all our clinics, we are witnessing a 'Covid Generation' of young children who have never seen a dentist and are presenting with high levels of decay requiring care, often under a general anaesthetic. Crucially, these young patients have not been acclimatised to seeing the dentist from an early age and often have severe dental anxiety as a result, making treatment difficult. They have never received minimally invasive early intervention treatments such as fluoride varnish application or important oral health improvement information about toothbrushing and sugar reduction.

Pop-Up Clinics:
A Community-Focused Solution

CDS has partnered with Luton Borough Council and a local General Dental Practitioner to deliver three 'Pop-Up' Clinics in accessible community locations, such as sports centres with good transport links.

These clinics, held mainly during school holidays to encourage attendance, focused on Triple Prevention:

• Oral Health Education: Parents and carers received practical advice on toothbrushing, sugar reduction, and healthy dietary choices.

• Child-Friendly Activities: Fun, age-appropriate sessions for children to learn about oral hygiene and making healthy lifestyle decisions.

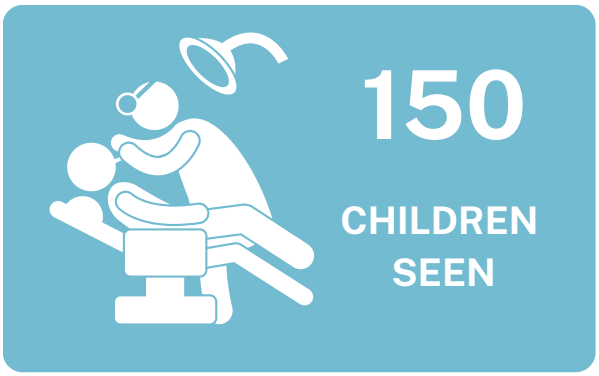
• Preventative Treatments: Fluoride varnish applications (with parental consent) to strengthen enamel and prevent tooth decay.

Every child attending the pop-up clinics received a dental examination, oral health information and fluoride varnish application, with referrals made for follow-up care where necessary.

Shared Care

The success of the ‘Pop-Up’ Clinics was underpinned by an effective partnership with the local dental community. Children requiring less complex treatment were signposted to a local general dental practice (GDP), while those with more complex needs or additional barriers to care were placed on a straightforward pathway to receive treatment at a CDS clinic.

Impact



• Over 150 children were seen, many of whom had limited or no prior access to dental care.

• 80% of the children had NEVER seen a dentist before.

• 95 children were offered fluoride varnish, a low-cost, highly effective preventative treatment that reduces the risk of future decay and invasive interventions.

• 150 children and their families received tailored oral health advice, creating a ripple effect that benefits entire households.

• All children were introduced to the dental team, helping to reduce dental anxiety and normalise routine dental visits.

The clinics also identified children with severe dental neglect or specific dental anomalies, such as missing, fused, or extra teeth, ensuring these cases were triaged for further care. Importantly, the clinics provided a less stressful environment for autistic and non-verbal children, enabling them to access the care they need in a supportive setting.

Why This Matters

The Pop-Up Clinics are not just about treating tooth decay; they are about breaking down barriers to care, building trust, and creating a foundation for lifelong good oral health. By reaching children who have been marginalised from accessing dental care, this project is helping to reduce health inequalities and prevent the escalation of dental issues that would require more costly and invasive care.

> Very professional. Great help.

> Great from start to finish. Daughter enjoyed the experience.

What's Next

The success of the Pop-Up Clinic model demonstrates the value of low-cost, innovative, community-based solutions in addressing childhood oral health inequalities. Through effective commissioning and partnerships, more of these simple and effective clinics can be rolled out across the country, reaching even more children and reducing the numbers admitted to hospital for care under general anaesthetic.