

Healthy Kids and Data-Driven Dentistry

The Healthy Kids Cambodia Program has been working from an online database to record dental treatment provided to the children we serve. We use that data to inform program delivery. The data are also used by local dental students (University of Puthisastra) for their thesis dissertations. Over the last few months, we have been working with students to do some special data analyses which we would like to share with ICD Fellows, who have long supported our work. Overall, we learned: There was a 50% increase in the prevalence of dental infections during 2020-2022 and double the presence of cavitations on first permanent molars. This increase in disease demonstrates the impact of the pandemic on the diet and oral health of young children in Cambodia.

Within our program, a group of around 1,000 children per year with special needs also get treatment. We were eager to make sure that our program met the needs of this group in the same way that it addressed the needs of those in mainstream public schools. From our analyses, we learned:

- Children with special needs that we have treated in our program later have lower dental anxiety. Those children who had received treatment from our team in the past were four times less likely to feel anxious about getting dental treatment.
- Children with special needs have a more significant burden of decay in permanent teeth. There is still room for improvement - we learned that the schools for children with special needs house children who are older than the other schools we treat. Our program has been optimised for children 12 years and younger, and a more tailored approach is needed to address the needs of adolescent children (who mostly have all permanent teeth), particularly teenage children with special needs.
- Children who are deaf are more likely to experience discomfort during dental treatment. We learnt that one in three children experience some discomfort during our treatment, and children who are deaf are more likely to have a negative experience. Our team will now think about how we can make the dental treatment experience more comfortable for children who are deaf.

Using the database has helped us better understand the experiences of children in our program, and we hope that data in 2024 will show us that the work done during this year has helped children return to a pre-pandemic level of oral health. Watch this space!





Students from the University of Puthisastra working with children who have special needs along with the Healthy Kids team.