B ad dental hygiene could increase the risk of swine flu, according to the British Dental Health Foundation.

The National Dental Survey carried out by the British Dental Health Foundation as part of National Smile Month found that dreadful dental habits are helping spread germs as 40 per cent of the UK population admit to picking their teeth with their fingernails.

The survey found that people are also picking their teeth with everyday items such as earrings, credit cards, paperclips, paper and even screwdrivers.

Foundation chief executive Dr Nigel Carter said: ‘Hygiene warnings have been made clear ever since the swine flu outbreak, and it is worrying that these habits have been re-numbered as the numbers affected by flu steadily rises. Personal hygiene should be a top priority for all.’

Research highlighted the UK’s lack of awareness of the importance of oral health, with research linking gum disease to heart disease, diabetes, strokes, premature births, low birth-weight babies and, in recent early studies, infertility.

Yet awareness of these important overall health links is low.

Two-thirds remain unaware of possible links to heart disease, four in five knew nothing of the links to strokes or diabetes, while 84 per cent of respondents had no clue of potential risks posed to pregnant women.

The public could be put at risk by poor dental hygiene habits yet awareness of these links is very low, said Dr Carter.

Gum disease in particular has been linked to serious health issues. It affects most people at some point in their lives, so there is no excuse for ignoring good dental hygiene.

People should take care of their gums by brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between teeth with floss or an interdental brush, cutting down on how often they take sugary snacks and drinks and visiting the dentist regularly, he added.

The Foundation’s National Dental Helpline is available with expert advice for the public on advice on 0845 065 1188.

Dreadful dental habits are helping to spread germs

The Department of Health (DH) has issued guidance to dental practices on what to do if the swine flu outbreak turns into a pandemic.

The DH is warning dentists that fewer patients will attend a dental practice for treatment during a pandemic as illness and anxiety will encourage patients to cancel or delay appointments.

However some patients both well and infected will need dental treatment.

All patients should be screened for symptoms of flu before attending the practice by telephone and again on arrival at the practice, said the DH.

Treatment of infected patients should be limited to pain relief and should avoid aerosol-generating procedures where possible and infected patients should be segregated from well patients.

The full guidance can be found on the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk.

Tories unveil new dentistry reforms

A n e-learning solution giving practical help on how to prevent occupational back pain has been launched.

The CD-Rom Perfect Posture for the Dental Team, produced by Smile-on in conjunction with Ellis Paul, who has more than 50 years of experience in teaching perfect posture and four-handed dentistry in the UK and overseas.

Studies have shown that 80 per cent of dental professionals suffer from back or neck pain caused entirely by working in distorted postures.

This is a symptom of an underlying condition which can vary from mere discomfort to a permanent musculoskeletal lesion.

At best it makes life miserable - at worst it causes absence from work (with often considerable loss of income) and frequent visits to physiotherapist and osteopath.

In some cases it has forced dentists into premature retirement.

This e-learning programme, which is also available online, aims to prevent pain, disability and depression of work standards due to musculoskeletal problems.

Just a few of the techniques shown include using the five variables, better access and vision, direct and mirror vision, soft tissue control, aspiration and instrumentation, and correct stools and seated posture.

A spokesperson for Smile-on said: ‘Back and neck pain is preventable and amazingly most dentists either do not seem to know how to prevent it or, if they do, don’t bother to take appropriate steps to do something. It is far more sensible to take relatively simple measures to prevent it occurring in the first place rather than waiting till they are in pain and rushing off for treatment.’

The CD-Rom produced by Smile-On provides the complete solution to the problem. It comprises the whole of Ellis Paul’s One–day Hands-On Course but with additional techniques such as rubber dam, and a whole section on exercises.

Recognising that it is not only dentists but dental nurses, therapists and hygienists also suffer occupational back pain, it shows how the same preventative techniques apply to them as well. Thus it is for the whole team.’

For more information please call Laura McKenzie on 020 7400 8989 or email info@smile-on.com

Swine flu dentistry link

Preventing back pain

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Guest comment
The laboratory experiment

My technician told me that the current climate is not easy for dental labs, which have to cope with a 20-30 per cent increase in materials purchased from abroad. With a decline in output since 2006, many laboratories are struggling to find money for future investment and are forced to constantly evaluate the service they provide in terms of cost, quality and value. With the decline in the pound forcing the cost of materials up and rising competition from overseas laboratories, it is clear that something has to give, but it is also clear that neither dentists nor patients benefit from these changes.

The HSC found that the number of complex treatments such as crowns, bridges and dentures had fallen by 57 per cent since 2006 whilst at the same time extractions were rising. The initial promise of dentists having more time for preventative care seems to be superceded by the reality that for some this new system offers little more than unrealistic targets, with every complaint raised by the profession answered with the ambivalent term ‘swings and roundabouts’. The rising cost of lab-work, materials and cross infection procedures illustrates the inflexibility of this approach and acts to further undermine confidence in the future of the NHS.

Whilst the retail price index stands at 3.2 per cent recommendations from the review body on doctors and dentists pay have set dentists pay rise at just over a fifth of one percent, which in real terms means a pay cut. Clearly prudence by central government needs to be exercised especially in our current economic climate but why should individual practices be left to pick up the tab when providing a national service? Perhaps it is here where government needs to rethink the sensitive balance between cost, quality and value when deciding on future commissioning.

The tightening of cross infection regulations in dental practices is surely a good thing. As times change, so does our understanding of how we face the challenges of modern day dentistry. Unlike hospitals, dentists face a delicate balancing act between providing healthcare and running a business. Hospital doctors in this respect do not have any direct financial burden if choosing a treatment option which is not cost effective, whilst dentists still do. So when a change in regulations such as the introduction of single use endodontic files or washer disinfectors is introduced, GDP’s directly feel the pinch. In a hospital setting this may not be such a problem, but in general practice making large investments such as these can have a bigger impact.

Regardless of which side of the fence you sit on, the question lingers on: is the NHS providing a service based on cost, quality or value? Of course the answer is probably a little bit of each, but as the cost of dentistry rises within the confines of a rigid, target driven contract what should we expect to give? And do the general public really expect cross infection controls (suitable more for complex brain surgery than general dentistry) at any cost?

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* Graphical representation based on SEM photography, for illustration only

About the author
Neel Kothari qualified as a dentist from Bristol University Dental School in 2005, and currently works in Cambridge as an associate within the NHS. He has completed a year-long postgraduate certificate in implantology at UCL’s Eastman Dental Institute, and regularly attends postgraduate courses to keep up-to-date with current best practice.