

World Health Assembly Resolution paves the way for better oral health care

27 May 2021 | News release | Reading time: 1 min (376 words)

More than 3.5 billion people suffer from oral diseases. Untreated dental caries (tooth decay) in permanent teeth is the most common. Severe periodontal (gum) disease affects almost 10% of the global population and more than 530 million children suffer from dental caries of primary teeth. Oral diseases disproportionately affect the poor and socially-disadvantaged populations. Most oral diseases have been linked with other noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, pneumonia, obesity and premature birth.

Most oral health conditions are largely preventable and can be treated in their early stages but treatment is often not affordable as usually not part of universal health coverage packages. The use of fluoride, which can substantially reduce the risk of dental caries, remains inaccessible in many parts of the world.

The World Health Assembly approved today a historic Resolution on oral health. The Resolution urges Member States to address key risk factors of oral diseases shared with other noncommunicable diseases such as high intake of free sugars, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol, and to enhance the capacities of oral health professionals. It also recommends a shift from the traditional curative approach towards a preventive approach that includes promotion of oral health within the family, schools and

workplaces, and includes timely, comprehensive and inclusive care within the primary health-care system. During the discussion, clear agreement emerged that oral health should be firmly embedded within the noncommunicable disease agenda and that oral health-care interventions should be included in universal health coverage programmes.

The World Health Assembly delegates asked WHO: to develop, by 2022, a draft global strategy on tackling oral diseases for consideration by WHO governing bodies in 2022 and by 2023; to translate the global strategy into an action plan for oral health; to develop “best buy” interventions on oral health; and to explore the inclusion of noma (a disease which is fatal for 90% of children affected) within the roadmap for neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030.

WHO was asked to report back on progress and results until 2031 as part of the consolidated report on noncommunicable diseases.