



Campaign toolkit for dental & health professionals

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About Safe Smiles

Safe Smiles - a healthy smile in professional hands

The average person in the UK spends hundreds of pounds each year on dental care.

In recent years, there has been a greater desire for a smile that not only feels healthy but looks good as well. This has led more patients to consider treatments that improve the appearance of their smile.

But are the correct choices being made?

Safe Smiles is a new public awareness campaign which aims to highlight the benefits and importance of safe dentistry.

Run by the [Oral Health Foundation](#), Safe Smiles promotes how to stay safe while getting a great smile. The campaign looks at the benefits of cosmetic treatment when carried out in the dental practice. It also reassures patients about the safety of cosmetic dentistry when performed by qualified and registered professionals.

The campaign also addresses the potential consequences of direct-to-consumer alternatives, tackles the dangers of unqualified persons carrying out dentistry and gives advice about the safety of ingredients and products been pushed as 'safe' for smiles.

Safe Smiles is being supported by [Align Technology](#) and has the widescale backing from the dental industry.

The campaign is being endorsed by the [British Orthodontic Society](#), [British Dental Industry Association](#), [British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry](#), [British Dental Bleaching Society](#), [British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy](#), [British Association of Dental Nurses](#), and the [British Association and Dental Therapists](#).



Key messages

Safe Smiles promotes a series of key messages that underline the importance of having safe dental treatment. Please support Safe Smiles by sharing these with patients.

The key messages can be summed up as follows:

- For the best, safest, and healthiest smile, see a dental professional.
- When performed in a dental practice, cosmetic dental treatment is extremely safe and can have many benefits, not only for a patient's smile but also on their mental health.
- Before having cosmetic dentistry, patients should make sure the person carrying out the treatment is qualified and legally allowed to do so.
- Those attempting to make changes to a patient's smile, who are not qualified and registered to do so, could leave patients with severe and long-term damage.
- Patients should not attempt their own dentistry at home. For a safe smile, visit the dentist and always follow their advice.

Statistics reveal real concerns for UK smiles

Data collected by the Oral Health Foundation shows that many UK adults wish they could change things about their smile.

Our research also suggests that the pandemic has not been kind on the nation's oral health and has even driven many into some form of DIY dentistry. Here are some key stats that highlight the importance of Safe Smiles.

- 84% of UK adults would change something about their smile.
- 32% of UK adults don't like the colour of their teeth.
- 11% of UK adults think their teeth are too crooked.
- 48% of UK adults say Zoom calls have made them more self-conscious about their smile.
- 55% of UK adults feel they have neglected their teeth during lockdown.
- 25% of UK households have opted for some form of DIY dentistry during lockdown.
- 13% of UK households have at least one person that has taken painkillers for dental pain and 8% have at least one person that has attempted to treat a cavity in a tooth.
- 8% of UK households have at least one person that has attempted to extract a tooth and 15% admit to not brushing their teeth as much as before the pandemic.
- 20% of UK adults are now eating unhealthier foods and 11% have been drinking more alcohol.



The issues at hand

Safe dentistry

Dentistry is no longer just a case of filling and taking out teeth. Today, more patients than ever before are turning to dentistry as a way of improving their appearance.

Whether they are straightening, lightening, reshaping, or repairing their teeth, patients must be aware that treatment is extremely complex and requires expert hands and a safe environment

Unfortunately, many patients are making the mistake of attempting treatments at home and following unsafe advice online. Others are choosing to have dental treatment carried out by people who are not legally allowed to do so.

Safe Smiles will be urging patients to make the right choices when considering dental treatment, advising them not to put their health at risk.

Messages to share with patients

- Dental professionals have the very best training, qualifications, and experience to help you achieve the smile you are looking for.
- Avoid having dental treatment with anybody that is not registered with the GDC. Not only are these people breaking the law, but they could also leave you with long term or permanent damage.
- By going to a dentist, you will receive the best care and can guarantee the best results. This makes it the smartest and safest choice.
- To keep you safe, dental professionals and dental practices are following recommended advice to prevent cases of COVID-19. Dental professionals must all wear the appropriate level of protective clothing (PPE) and face masks, depending on their interaction with you.

Adult Orthodontics

Patients would not book themselves in for laser eye surgery without asking an optician if it is suitable for them. Nor would they attempt to perform their own laser eye surgery at home.

This is exactly the attitude needed when they are considering orthodontics.

Recent stats revealed the pandemic has seen a rise in the number of people seeking orthodontic treatment. With this demand comes a growth in online companies offering treatments.

Embarking on treatment without seeing a suitably trained clinician could result in serious conditions being missed or dangerous treatment carried out. Safe Smiles wants to ensure patients have the very best advice about the safest and most effective way to have treatment. We know that, when carried out correctly, orthodontic treatment can have a positive and life-changing impact.

Messages to share with patients

- Home impression kits and scanning machines in shops look at your teeth and their current position, but they don't assess the health of your mouth. A full dental examination before orthodontic treatment gives you a reassures you that the treatment can proceed safely and will be right for your needs.
- X-rays are vital for planning safe movement of teeth because they look at the bone health and the length of your roots. A dental practice or hospital is the only way to have a thorough oral assessment and x-ray before orthodontic treatment.
- During orthodontic treatment, you are at greater risk of a number of oral conditions. Having orthodontic treatment at a dental practice puts you in the safest place when your health might be at risk.

Tooth whitening

Professional tooth whitening is a complex procedure which involves the use of powerful chemicals that can do harm a patient's teeth and gums if not used properly. It's for this reason that tooth whitening carried out in the wrong hands is so dangerous.

Chemical burns, blisters and ulcerations on the gums, and swollen lips, are all common consequences when things go wrong.

Safe Smiles will be advising against DIY whitening at home, and illegal treatments by unqualified people. The campaign will be emphasising the law - that tooth whitening is an act of dentistry and should only be carried out by dental professionals.

Messages to share with patients

- If you decide to go through with tooth whitening treatment, it should be carried out by a dentist, in a dental practice. This means treatment will be as safe and effective as possible.
- It is illegal for anyone other than a qualified dental professional such as a dentist, hygienist, or dental therapist to carry out tooth whitening.
- It is common to see tooth whitening kits and home treatments advertised on websites and social media. Because many of these products come from overseas so it is difficult to guarantee product ingredients or safety. This might put your smile at risk.
- Chemical burns, blisters and ulcerations on the gums, and swollen lips can occur when tooth whitening goes wrong. That's why it's important to put yourself in safe hands.

Dental tourism

Dental holidays are presented as a cheap and hassle-free alternative to getting treatment in the UK. However, we know from calls to our Dental Helpline that if things do go wrong, they are anything but straight forward.

Those contacting us have complained of facing dental bills of up to £10,000 to correct poor quality dental work, while one caller had to be taken to A&E to drain an infection after her face swelled up so that she could not open her eye.

These stories are not uncommon. A report by consumer advice group Which?, found that more than a quarter of patients travelling abroad for medical treatment do not feel like they received the follow-up care they needed, while a further 18% report complications.

That's why Safe Smiles will be encouraging patients to stay in the UK for their dental treatment.

Messages to share with patients

- In the UK, all dental professionals must be registered with the General Dental Council (GDC) – the dental regulator. The standards set by the GDC are extremely high. This is to make sure you receive a high standard of care, under safe conditions.
- Standards of dental treatment abroad can vary and a poor experience will not only fail to meet your expectations, but can also put your smile, and health, at risk.
- Quite often, time is essential to achieving the best results. For instance, to achieve a perfect bite, you need repeat visits and a series of adjustments. This may not be possible if the dentist is abroad.
- If you experience problems after dental treatment, it could be difficult and costly to return to the same clinic if it is abroad.

Sports & mouthguards

Many sports can pose a danger to a patient's mouth when there is a chance of other people, or objects, coming into contact with them. This is just as true for non-contact sports as it is for those sports that have contact.

Between 13% and 39% of all dental injuries in the UK are linked to accidents during sport and it also accounts for around 25% of children injuring or losing front teeth.

Safe Smiles will be encouraging all patients to look after their mouth and oral health when playing sport.

As part of this, the campaign will be promoting mouthguards as an essential piece of athletic equipment for anyone participating in a sport that involves falls, body contact, or fast-moving objects.

Messages to share with patients

- Common sporting injuries that can put your mouth at risk include cuts and bruises to the lips and gums, broken teeth, tooth loss and tooth misalignment.
- While playing sport it is important to think about the health of your mouth.
- Athletes are 60 times more likely to suffer harm to the teeth if they do not wear a mouthguard. Because of this, mouthguards are recommended for anybody involved in regular sport.
- Visit your dentist when considering a mouthguard. They will be able to take very detailed impressions of your mouth so that the mouthguard fits comfortably and is able to protect your teeth and gums.

Accessories

We are finding it increasingly common that patients are looking for different ways to change the visual appearance of their mouth and teeth.

Many popular oral accessories are either bought online, or fitted by unqualified people. Safe Smiles is concerned about poorly fitting appliances and the damage they can cause for a patient's mouth. Some procedures also come with the added dangers of covering up or masking undiagnosed oral conditions.

- Tooth jewellery
- Oral piercings
- Mouth tattoos
- Grillz / Grills
- Jaw modifications
- Clip on veneers

Messages to share with patients

- Before going ahead with any treatment that changes the appearance of your mouth and teeth, visit a dentist first.
- Tooth jewellery is not advised by dental professionals because it makes daily cleaning difficult and could lead to a build-up of bacteria. Over time this can cause tooth decay and tooth loss.
- Infection, prolonged bleeding, pain, swelling, and injury to the teeth and gums are potential problems with oral piercings. Treatment should take place in a sterilised environment and carried out a registered piercer.
- Any tattoo comes with risks, however, mouth tattoos come with added dangers. Because mouth tattoos are placed on soft tissue, it makes it extremely difficult to cover, protect and keep clean.
- Grillz might increase your risk of tooth decay and gum disease because bacterial plaque can get trapped between them and the tooth's surface.

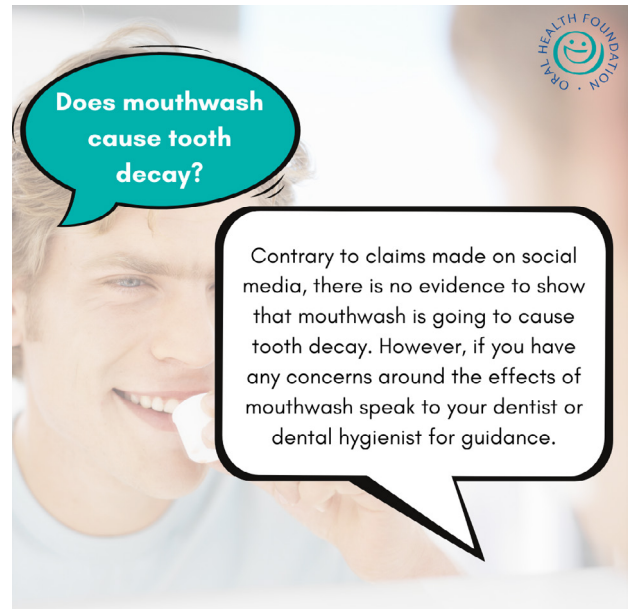


Supporting Safe Smiles

Completing our survey

To best help protect patients from harmful DIY dental trends, we first need to get a deeper understanding of the scale of the problem. This is where you can really help us and make sure the key messages of Safe Smiles get to the people who need to hear them most.

By filling out our [Dental Health Professional's Survey](#) you can put a spotlight on the problem of DIY dentistry and help inform our work.



Sharing your stories



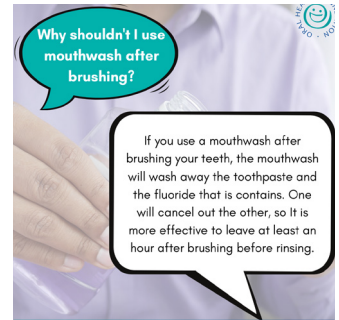
One of the best ways we can help patients understand the complexity and dangers of dentistry is by telling your stories. We want to hear from you about cases where patients have **suffered complications as a result of DIY or direct-to-consumer dentistry.**

We also want to hear from the patients themselves. Get in touch with the Oral Health Foundation by emailing the team on pr@dentalhealth.org.

Working with local media

Local newspapers, radio and television stations have a tremendous impact for helping us to promote the benefits of safe dentistry while raising awareness about what might go wrong if shortcuts are taken.

[Download our press release template](#) and send it to your local media.



Posting on social media



Social media can be a hotbed of misinformation. When it comes to giving health advice, this can be really harmful. Be active in posting messages that champion the importance of having safe dentistry.

Share information from the [Safe Smiles website](#), and re-post these [sample social media graphics](#). Remember to hashtag #SafeSmiles too!



Useful information

Staying up to date

The best way to stay up-to-date with our latest Safe Smiles campaign updates is by following the campaign on social media.

The Oral Health Foundation will be posting regular updates and stories about the importance of achieving a great smile in a safe way. Follow the charity on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#). You can also search #SafeSmiles.

Getting in touch

If you would like to get in touch with us to discuss Safe Smiles, including how you can get involved and support the campaign.

Please email the Oral Health Foundation's PR team at pr@dentalhealth.org, or give us a call on 01788 539792.

A campaign by



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