

# Oral Hygiene among Irish schoolchildren

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## HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1,2</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Dr Candace Currie of the University of Edinburgh. In 2002 HBSC Ireland surveyed 8,424 Irish children from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

Further information is available at:  
<http://www.hbsc.org>  
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>  
<http://www.hbsc.org/countries/ireland.html>



### Summary

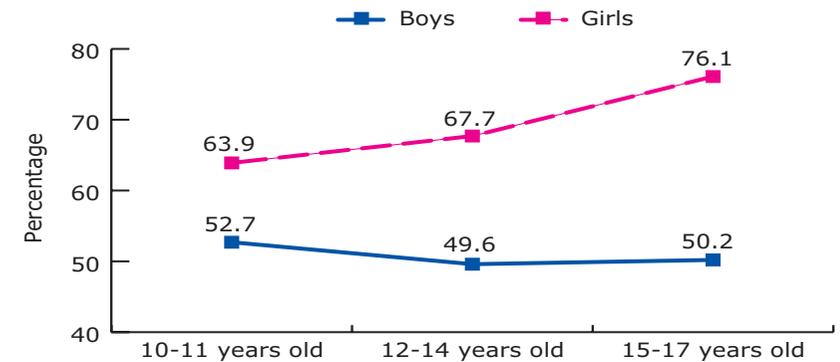
HBSC Ireland has found that 61.6% of children report that they brush their teeth more than once a day (50.2% of boys and 70.1% of girls), representing a slight increase since 1998. The percentage of boys that brush their teeth more than once a day shows a slight decrease with age (from 52.7% of 10-11 year olds to 50.2% of 15-17 year olds). Conversely, the percentage of girls increases with age (from 63.9% of 10-11 year olds to 76.1% of 15-17 year olds). Children who report brushing their teeth more than once a day are more likely to: live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents and best friend, like school and report excellent health and feeling happy about their life.

### Why this topic?

Despite a reduction in the prevalence of dental caries in Ireland, there are still large numbers of people who suffer high levels of dental decay and gum disease. Toothbrushing is viewed as an important method for maintaining gum health and, when combined with fluoride toothpaste, is a significant method of plaque control<sup>3</sup>.

### Trends 1998 – 2002

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of children who report that they brush their teeth more than once a day, from 57.4% in 1998 to 61.6% in 2002. This increase is found among both boys (46.7% to 50.2%) and girls (67.8% to 70.1%) and is found across all age groups although it is most prominent among boys aged 10-11 years (47.0% to 52.7%).

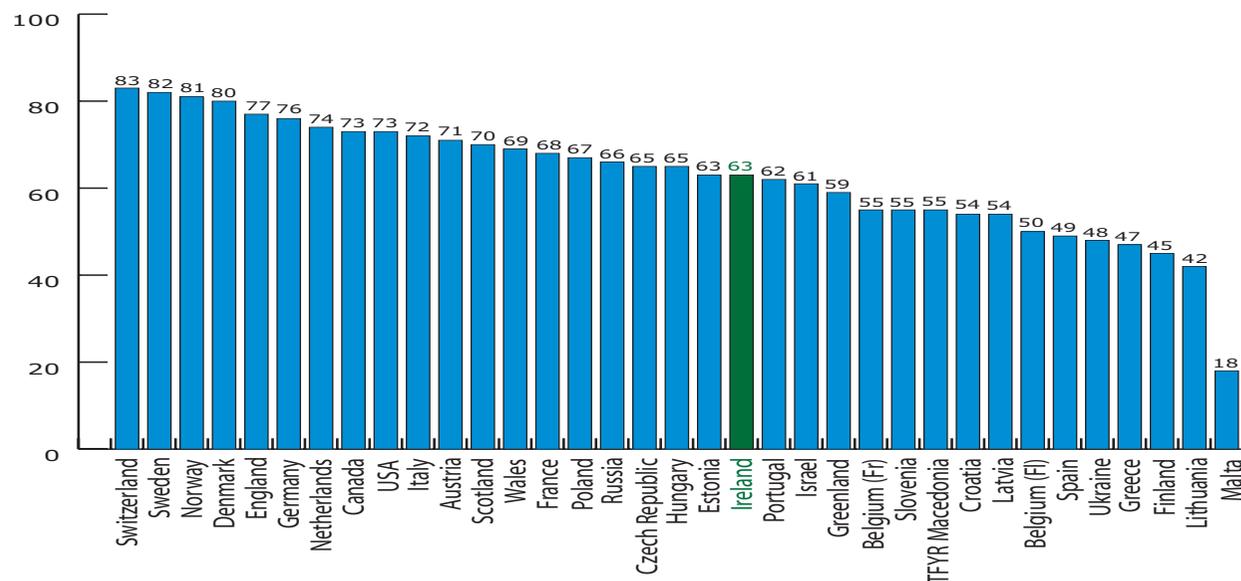


Percentage of children who brush their teeth more than once a day by age and gender, HBSC 2002

### Oral Hygiene in context

- Children from higher social classes are more likely to report brushing their teeth more than once a day (social classes 1-2, 66%, social classes 5-6, 58%).
- Children living with both parents are more likely to brush their teeth more than once a day, than children who do not (63% vs. 56%).
- Children who brush their teeth more than once a day are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (78% vs. 72%) & father (55% vs. 50%), than those who don't.
- Children who brush their teeth more than once a day are more likely to report finding it easy to talk to their best friend, than those who do not (86% vs. 82%).
- Children who brush their teeth more than once a day are more likely to report liking school, than those who do not (72% vs. 64%).
- Children who brush their teeth more than once a day are more likely to report excellent health (30% vs. 24%) and feeling happy about their life (50% vs. 39%), than those who do not.

## ...Oral Hygiene among Irish schoolchildren



Percentage of 15 years old children reporting that they brush their teeth more than once a day, by country

- Tooth brushing is not associated with spending time with friends or being pressured by schoolwork.

### International

Irish 15 year olds (boys and girls together) are ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among 35 countries in Europe and North America, with 63% reporting that they brush their teeth more than once a day. Overall, 57% of Irish 11 years olds (ranked 16<sup>th</sup>) and 61% of Irish 13 years olds (ranked 16<sup>th</sup>), report that they brush their teeth more than once a day.

### Implications

The overall percentage of children in Ireland (both boys and girls) that reported brushing their teeth more than once a day, has only slightly increased since 1998 and can be considered midrange between the rankings of other countries in Europe and North America. The data presented

here indicate that such behaviour is relatively low in comparison to some other countries in Europe and North America. The findings show that strong family and social relationships and positive health outcomes are associated with tooth brushing. Given the relatively low percentage of children engaged in brushing their teeth more than once a day, more emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of regular oral hygiene and the possible implications of poor oral health particularly among primary school children. Attention should also be paid to the lower rates of tooth brushing in older boys and younger girls and why such a pattern exists.

### References

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2. Currie, C., Roberts, C., Morgan, A., Smith, R., Settertobulte, W., Samdal, O. & Barnakov-Rasmussen, V. (eds.) (2004). Young people's health in context. Health Policy for Children and Adolescent No. 4. Copenhagen: WHO-Europe.
3. The Dental Health Foundation (2002). *Oral Health in Ireland*. Dublin: The Dental Health Foundation, Ireland and The Oral Health Services Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Cork, in association with the Department of Health and Children.

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