Replacing toothbrush after sore throat may be unnecessary

WASHINGTON, USA: Researchers from the US have found that it may not be necessary to discard children’s toothbrushes upon diagnosis of streptococcal pharyngitis, as is commonly advised. Their study showed no evidence of increased bacterial growth on the toothbrushes of infected children.

In a preliminary experiment, the researchers grew group A streptococcus (GAS), the bacterium that causes strep throat, on toothbrushes of infected children. In the subsequent human study, 14 patients diagnosed with strep throat, 15 patients with sore throat and 27 healthy individuals aged 2 to 20 were instructed to brush their teeth for more than one minute using a new toothbrush. When testing for bacterial growth, the researchers found GAS only on one toothbrush, which had been used by a patient without strep throat. “The study supports that it is probably unnecessary to throw away your toothbrush after diagnosis of strep throat,” said Dr Judith L. Bowen, co-author of the study and associate professor at the University of Texas Medical Branch’s Department of Pediatrics, which conducted the research.

Dr Nathan Laughrey, co-author of the study and dean of the College of Dental Surgery at the University of Texas Medical Branch’s Department of Pediatrics, which conducted the research, said: “Since the recession began five years ago, the patients who walk through my doors have been increasingly stressed out about whether they can afford the care they need,” said Dr Nathan Laughrey, who runs a number of Aspen Dental practices. “The survey is a stark reminder of the need to improve public understanding about the importance of dental care to overall health, as well as to create a better understanding about the long-term effects of ignoring dental visits, including the link between gum disease and other serious conditions such as diabetes and stroke.”

US adults delay dental care

SYRACUSE, NY, USA: A survey of more than 1,000 US adults has revealed that 56 per cent have delayed or would delay dental treatments owing to their current financial situation. Although more than 80 per cent knew about the long-term financial implications of neglecting oral health, many people seemed to put dental care off until they experienced significant pain or had a dental emergency, the investigators said.

The survey involved 501 men and 504 women aged 18 and older. It was conducted as a telephone survey by market research agency ORC International on behalf of Aspen Dental, one of the largest networks of dental care providers in the US, between 28 Feb and 3 March.

Overall, the results were in line with other studies that found a general decline in health care spending. More than 30 per cent of the people surveyed reported that their net salary was lower this year than in 2012. Moreover, 44 per cent had no dental insurance. The number was especially high among those with an annual income below US$35,000 (61 per cent), the investigators said.

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They also found that only 1 in 3 agreed that routine dental visits were critical to their overall well-being.

“The study supports that it is probably unnecessary to throw away your toothbrush after diagnosis of strep throat,” said Dr Judith L. Bowen, co-author of the study and associate professor at the University of Texas Medical Branch’s Department of Pediatrics, which conducted the research. As the current study only involved a small sample size, larger studies are needed to confirm that GAS does not grow on toothbrushes used at home by children with an infection, she added.

The findings were presented at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies in Washington, DC, in May.

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