Patients in Wales will start to receive dental check-ups at a frequency to suit them Health Minister Jane Hutt said today when she welcomed new clinical guideline published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

The new guideline states that the recommended interval between dental check-ups should be determined specifically for each patient, and tailored to meet his or her needs, on the basis of an assessment of disease levels and risk of or from dental disease. This replaces the current practice of advising everyone to come back for a check-up at six monthly intervals.

Jane Hutt said: "The NICE guideline supports the new arrangements for the delivery of NHS dentistry, which will fit around the needs of the patient. The guideline is an important step in the process toward modernising NHS dentistry and starts the move away from the "one size fits all" approach. The guidance will be incorporated into the new contractual arrangements for LHBs which will be introduced in Wales from October 2005.

"This is the first NICE guideline that is going to affect everyone and it will mean a change for some people in how often they have a routine check-up. It is good news for patients as it means that they will get a more personalised service. Instead of the common six monthly intervals, patients will receive check-ups at periods tailored to their individual need.

"This is likely to mean that some patients - such as children who may have problems with their teeth – will see their dentist more frequently than they currently do; whilst others - for example adults with good oral health - may not need to see their dentist as often.

"It will help ensure consistency in the way patient’s check-ups are handled throughout the country and should get dentists and their patients talking to each other more about oral health and agreeing together how often the patient should come in for a check-up.

"Whilst this guideline may mean that some people see their dentist less often for check-ups, I must stress that patients can, and should, go back and see their dentist sooner if they experience any problems with their teeth between check-ups."

The guideline also recommends that:

- During a check-up, the dental team (led by the dentist) should ensure that comprehensive histories are taken, examinations are conducted and initial preventive advice is given. This will allow the dental team and the patient to discuss, where appropriate:
  - the effects of oral hygiene, diet, fluoride use, tobacco and alcohol on oral health;
NICE issues guidance on frequency of dental check-ups

- the risk factors that may influence the patient’s oral health, and their implications for deciding the appropriate recall interval;
- the outcome of previous care episodes and the suitability of previously recommended intervals;
- the patient’s ability or desire to visit the dentist at the recommended interval; and
- the financial costs to the patient of having the check-up and any subsequent treatments.

The interval before the next check-up should be chosen, either at the end of a check-up if no further treatment is indicated, or on completion of specific treatment.

- For under 18s the interval between check–ups should be between 3 and 12 months. For adults the interval should be between 3 and 24 months.
- The dentist should discuss the recommended recall interval with the patient and record this interval, and the patient’s agreement or disagreement with it, in the patient’s records.

The oral health checklist provided for dentists in the guidance should help them spot the early signs of either serious oral disease or oral manifestations of systemic disorders in their patients. The guideline will help to ensure that patients at increased risk of malignancy (such as those who smoke or drink heavily) are seen by their dentists more frequently and as a result any problem can be diagnosed and treated earlier.

Posters are being sent to every dental surgery in Wales and England to inform people about the changes and a factsheet is also available from the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) or by telephoning the NHS Response line (0870 1555 455. Quote number N0737).

Notes

About NICE

1. NICE is part of the NHS. It is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on treatments and care for those using the NHS in England and Wales. Its guidance is for healthcare professionals and patients and their carers to help them make decisions about treatment and healthcare. For further information about NICE you can visit www.nice.org.uk.

2. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:

- the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS in England and Wales – technology appraisals.
- the appropriate treatment and care of patients with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS in England and Wales – clinical guidelines.
- whether interventional procedures used for diagnosis or treatment are safe enough and work well enough for routine use – interventional procedures.
1. NICE also funds three enquiries that undertake research into the way patients are treated to identify ways of improving the quality of care (the investigations are known as confidential enquiries).

2. NICE guidance and recommendations are prepared by independent groups that include professionals working in the NHS and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers.

**About clinical guidelines**

3. Clinical guidelines are recommendations on the appropriate treatment and care of patients with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS in England and Wales. They sit alongside, but do not replace, the knowledge and skills of experienced health professionals.

4. Clinical guidelines are developed by independent groups that include healthcare professionals working in the NHS, patients and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers. Professional and patient/carer groups whose members are likely to be affected by the guideline are able to submit information and comment on the recommendations before they are finalised.

5. The guideline on dental recall was developed by the National Collaborating Centre for Acute Care which is based at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The following partners have member status on the management board of the centre:

- Faculty of Dental Surgery
- Royal College of Anaesthetists
- Royal College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal College of Surgeons
- Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

*27 October 2004*