



Crew Health: Maintaining dental hygiene

As seafarers can spend weeks at sea on a voyage it is not unusual that tooth pain or dental related illness will strike far from land. The risk of dental problems is increased for seafarers because of their limited access to regular and advanced dental care whilst at sea.

Most frequent dental problems at sea

Some of the most frequent dental problems at sea include:

Tooth decay

The decomposition of tooth structure caused by the destructive toxins created by plaque, a combination of natural bacteria and food debris left on the teeth by inadequate oral hygiene.

Gum disease

This is inflammation of the gums that can progress to affect the bone that surrounds and supports the teeth. It is caused by the bacteria in plaque that constantly forms on the teeth.

Root canal problems

These occur when the tooth's pulp, a small thread-like tissue in the centre of the tooth, is damaged or diseased. The most common causes of pulp damage are a cracked tooth, a deep cavity or an injury such as a severe knock to the tooth.

Oral hygiene is key

As there are limited treatment options on board prevention is vital. Key aspects of good oral hygiene include:

- Using proper brushing techniques
- Changing toothbrushes regularly

Guidance and materials to use on board

Claims related to illness are frequently notified to the Club, with the number of claims reported remaining steady in number over the last five policy years. The Club has [partnered](#) with the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) to raise awareness of crew-related illness and to assist our Members in mitigating against related incidents.

To that end, we are able to offer our Members two publications which are available to download now and assist with aspects of dental care on board. These guidelines can be downloaded from the right hand side of the page or by clicking the links below:

- [Guidelines for dental care on board merchant ships](#)
- [Advice for dental care](#)

ISWAN has also produced three posters to help remind crew of dental hygiene best practice, which we are able to offer our Members to download. These guidelines can be downloaded from the right hand side of the page or by clicking the links below:

- [Visiting the dentist before embarking on a voyage](#)
- [Properly brushing teeth](#)
- [Changing toothbrushes regularly](#)

This article is the sixth in a series of articles in which the Club shares guidance and practical tips to our Members to promote good crew health on board. [All articles in this series can be viewed here.](#)