Billions to suffer from untreated decay
Dental neglect affects a third of the world’s population, according to report

LONDON, UK: Despite worldwide efforts to improve oral health, a new global study has revealed that 35 per cent of the world’s population currently suffers from untreated caries lesions in their permanent teeth. It also found that 621 million children worldwide have tooth decay that goes untreated.

To make things worse, hundreds of millions of new cases are expected to add to the burden of dental decay annually owing to neglected treatment, according to the paper published by researchers from the UK, the US and Australia in the latest Journal of Dental Research.

Even developed countries are affected, with one in three people in the UK suffering the consequences of neglected treatment, along with one in five in the USA, for example.

The findings which are part of latest Global Burden of Disease study involved a systematic review of all data on untreated dental decay, leading to a comprehensive report on rates of tooth decay for all countries, age groups and genders from 1990 and 2010. The team said to have analysed 192 studies of 1.5 million children aged 1 to 14 years old, across 74 countries, and 186 studies of 5.2 million people aged five years or older, across 67 countries.

Hundreds of millions of new cases are expected to add to the burden annually. (Photo Greta Gabaglio)
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“...We have seen a clear shift in the burden of tooth decay from children to adults. The current perception that low levels of decay in childhood will continue throughout life seems incorrect,” said lead author Prof. Wagner Marcenes from the Queen Mary University in London. “It is alarming to see prevention and treatment of tooth decay has been neglected at this level because if left untreated it can cause severe pain, mouth infection and it can negatively impact children’s growth.”

Marcenes explained that the study underscores the vital need to develop effective oral health promotion strategies.

“The fact that a preventable oral disease like tooth decay is the most prevalent of all diseases and injuries examined in our report is quite disturbing and should serve as a wake-up call to policymakers to increase their focus on the importance of dental health,” he continued. “Extending oral health promotion activities to the work environment is necessary to maintain good oral health to reduce the major biological, social and financial burden on individuals and healthcare systems.”

Oceania to implement the Minamata Convention

DT Asia Pacific

APIA, Samoa: The first subregional meeting on the Minamata Convention on Mercury in the Oceania region was held in Samoa’s capital, Apia, from 19 to 21 January. The workshop aimed to support Pacific islands in the early ratification of the convention and implementation of measures to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. Over the course of three days, participants were introduced to the various articles of the convention and learnt about how national strategies are required to take into account the management of mercury and other hazardous wastes, as well as the significant lack of data regarding levels of mercury, particularly in Pacific fish, Malielegaoi said.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury was signed in October 2013. In adopting the treaty, governments agreed on the development and implementation of national strategies to reduce or eliminate the production and industrial use of the harmful substance. The treaty has implications for the dental industry, among others, as dental amalgam contains about 50 per cent mercury. It is considered a significant source of mercury released into the environment.

Since the signing of the treaty, workshops have been organised in different parts of the world in support of the ratification and early implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the aim of workshops is to improve understanding of the convention, as well as to familiarise parties with the process of signing, ratification and implementation.

Informing participants about available sources of support and creating opportunities for exchange and action in the sub-regions are also part of the process.