

Dental hygiene in seafarers

Dental problems are often a major cause for concern amongst seafarers. At the UK P&I Club, we often see claims arising from dental problems that require urgent medical treatment and even repatriation of crew.

Whilst these claims individually may not be in the higher claim cost bracket, they frequently occur and can lead to repatriation of crew, which has a further impact on the safe manning of the ship and other delays to ship operations.

Seafarers are often at sea for long periods of time and unable to attend regular dental check-ups ashore, which may lead to dental problems developing unchecked. Long working hours and minimal physical exercise can result in the excessive consumption of highly caffeinated and very sugary drinks, unhealthy snacking and high levels of nicotine inhalation. In these circumstances, if oral health is neglected, gum disease, tooth decay and toothache can readily occur.

Toothache, whether mild or severe, may be further aggravated without surgical intervention. Onboard most ships there will only be pain relief treatment available, which will give short-term relief but not fix the underlying problem. This can have a detrimental effect on the seafarers' performance, concentration and wellbeing, not to mention a significant impact on sleep, eating and other daily activities.

Symptoms of periodontal disease are often not noticed until the disease is at an advanced stage. These include:

- Persistent bad breath
- Red or swollen gums
- Bleeding or tender gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose or sensitive teeth

Good dental hygiene is extremely important to ensure your teeth are not at risk. Effective cleaning removes dental plaque and tartar from the teeth, preventing cavities, gingivitis, gum disease, tooth decay and periodontal disease.

Seafarers are recommended to follow the basic steps listed below to ensure good oral hygiene and reduce the risk of dental issues:

1. Have regular dentist check-ups (at least one per year) particularly prior to long voyages.

2. Brush your teeth twice a day for a minimum of two minutes.
3. Replace your toothbrush frequently. Make sure the bristles of your toothbrush are not splayed.
4. Gently brush the outside of the teeth using a circular movement.
5. Ensure the bristles on your toothbrush cover both your teeth and your gums.
6. Don't forget to brush the inside and back of the teeth as well as the area surrounding the gums.
7. Floss or use inter-dental brushes daily. Try not to rub your gums. Use the floss or inter-dental brush to gently rub the side of the tooth in an up-and-down movement.
8. Rinse your mouth after brushing.



CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.