



# EMPOWERING FAMILIES OF YOUNG AUTISTIC CHILDREN TO ESTABLISH GOOD ORAL HEALTH HABITS

## Why is this research important?

Tooth decay is a major health problem. A quarter of five-year-olds have tooth decay. For autistic children, especially those with little or no verbal communication, tooth decay can lead to self-harm, impaired sleep and disrupted routines. Autistic children find it more difficult to go to a dentist or accept dental treatment. Frequently, their dental treatment is provided under general anaesthetic.

Tooth decay is preventable. Twice daily toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste and limiting sugary foods and drinks helps prevent tooth decay. These good habits should start in early childhood. For families of autistic children, establishing good habits can be complex, owing to extra challenges, such as communication, altered sensitivity and rigid behaviour patterns.

## What we plan to do:

We will work with autistic children, families and the professionals who care for them. Together, we will explore the barriers and facilitators to good oral health habits and design a support package. This package will help families to be confident in looking after their child's teeth. This project will identify what support they need, who could provide it and the best times to provide support.