



Medical Directors
Directors of Dentistry
Directors of Nursing
Chief Social Work Officers

25 July 2025

Dear all

Oral Swabs with Foam Heads

It has been highlighted that oral swabs with foam heads continue to be used in health and care settings.

There is a choking hazard when these are used for oral care, where foam heads have become detached. This also applies to swabs with flavours such as lemon and glycerine which, in addition to the risk of detachment, are harmful to teeth.

The Scottish Palliative Care Guidelines have recently been updated and recommend that oral swabs with foam heads should not be used. <https://rightdecisions.scot.nhs.uk/scottish-palliative-care-guidelines/symptom-management/mouth-care/>

There have been longstanding safety alerts related to oral swabs with a foam head, dating back to the Medical Device Alert MDA/2012/020 (13 April 2012). Recently, there have been a number of 'near misses' and the Ombudsman has subsequently been involved in considering complaints.

Although oral swabs with foam heads are not recommended, their use remains widespread. These 'near misses' have now prompted them to be removed from National Procurement. Alternative products will be available and many of these are already in use.

The alternative identified within National Procurement is the 360° toothbrush, which will be supplied in place of oral swabs with foam heads. Like a toothbrush, these are not single use and can be used for an individual patient for up to 3 months.

We request that you do not use the foam swabs on your patients and residents, immediately move to the alternative product and dispose of any unused stock.

Yours sincerely

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