Premier League footballers plagued by rotting teeth, UCL finds

By [Sarah Knapton](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/sarah-knapton/), Science Editor

11:30PM GMT 02 Nov 2015

**Comments**[33 Comments](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/11970016/Premier-League-footballers-plagued-by-rotting-teeth-UCL-finds.html#disqus_thread)

Nearly four out of 10 professional footballers have ongoing tooth decay, while eight out of 10 have gum disease according to a study by University College London

Premier League managers hoping to turnaround their club’s fortunes might ordinarily look to changing tactics, boosting morale and improving fitness.

But a new study suggests that [**rotting teeth**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/howaboutthat/11067916/Plaque-attack-Close-up-images-of-teeth-reveal-what-lives-in-your-mouth.html) may be holding back players from giving their peak performance and better dental health could enhance their on-pitch performance.

A study by University College London found that footballers at clubs like Manchester United, Southampton, West Ham, Hull City and Swansea have higher levels of [**tooth decay**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/howaboutthat/11067916/Plaque-attack-Close-up-images-of-teeth-reveal-what-lives-in-your-mouth.html) than the general population, possibly caused by drinking too many sugary sports drinks to boost energy levels.

Nearly four out of 10 professional footballers have ongoing [**tooth decay**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/11621887/Liquorice-helps-in-fight-against-tooth-decay.html), 57 per cent had tooth erosion, while eight out of 10 had gum disease which in some cases was irreversible. In contrast one in three adults have tooth decay in Britain.

Writing in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, researchers at UCL’s Centre for Oral Health said there was an ‘urgent’ need to tackle poor levels of dental hygiene in football.

Research lead, Professor Ian Needleman, said: “Although the severity of oral ill-health varied from team to team, overall we found that a significant percentage of our top footballers are affected by dental decay, tooth erosion and gum disease, much of which is preventable.

“But while these findings are worrying we are pleased that clubs are already embracing the findings and building on their existing interventions by placing oral health care at the forefront of their medical agenda.

“We hope that other teams follow their lead and introduce robust oral health screening and promotion as a routine element of their programs.”

Researchers enrolled 187 professional footballers from eight clubs in England and Wales. As well as the premiership clubs, the study included Championship teams Brighton & Hove Albion, Cardiff FC and from League One, Sheffield United.

Six dentists checked the tooth and gum health of every player and each footballer was asked about the impact of dental health on their personal and professional lives.

Nearly half said they were ‘bothered’ by poor tooth and gum health while 7 per cent said it adversely effected their training.

In 2012, West Ham player Ravel Morrison, was sent home from a pre-season tour to have seven teeth removed.

Club officials were initially preparing to fine the midfielder for missing a training session but when an examination revealed the parlous condition of his mouth they were forced to act.

West Ham went on to spend £28,000 on dental implants for Morrison, who now plays for Italian side Lazio.

The Upton Park club has since begun regularly screening players and has become one of the first clubs to start taking dental health seriously.

Stijn Vandenbroucke, Head of Medicine and Sports Science at [**West Ham**](http://www.whufc.com/)said: “Teeth problems never come at a good time, so we at WHUFC prefer to screen and plan preventive interventions with the dentist in the off and pre-season.

“Oral health is an area where many athletes have greater problems than the general population so it has been a massive achievement for so many professional football clubs to collaborate with each other to help us understand the scale of this problem better.

“Being part of this study has also helped us as a club to implement tailored interventions to treat and prevent further problems.

“There aren't many areas of screening in sport, which meet all screening criteria and can be so useful with such clear preventive benefits for athletes and club. Hopefully those who read the study will see the advantages as well."

Winston Reid, [**West Ham**](http://www.whufc.com/)centre back and New Zealand captain, said: "In the beginning of the season WHU organised a long screening day.

“The medical team had a look at our heart, blood, eyes and teeth. The dentist screened my teeth and explained to me in detail the dental problems that needed to be tackled to prevent painful teeth resulting in missing training.

“The club doctor organised a few dentist appointments and now a few months later I am smiling without worries, really top job from our medical boys."

A separate study found that drinking two or more glasses of sweetened drinks raises the risk of heart failure in men by 23 per cent.

The research by the University of Navarra, in Spain, was published in the journal Heart.