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## Public warned of dangers of illegal tooth whitening practices

***A shocking video showing a young woman with bleeding gums, swollen lips and sore teeth is a stark reminder of the dangers of illegal tooth whitening products and services.***

The video, produced by the Environmental Health Departments of the eleven District Councils and The Department for the Economy Trading Standards Service for Northern Ireland with support from the British Dental Association, highlights the risks of some tooth whitening products and services and advises people to protect their smile by speaking to their dentist before getting their teeth whitened. To view the video 'Protect Your Smile' visit: [www.nidirect.gov.uk/tooth-whitening](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/tooth-whitening).



Tooth whitening is now one of the most popular cosmetic treatments in the UK with products available widely through retailers or online. The practice involves bleaching the teeth using a whitening product usually containing hydrogen peroxide.

Whilst whitening is perfectly safe if carried out by a registered dental professional, an untrained person could cause permanent damage to teeth and gums and the law is clear that tooth whitening should be carried out within the practice of dentistry. This means that it is a criminal offence for anyone other than a registered dentist, or dental hygienist, dental

therapist or clinical dental technician acting to the prescription of a dentist, to offer or provide it. Criminal prosecutions for the illegal practice of dentistry can carry significant fines because of the risk these treatments pose to members of the public.

One of the most common injuries happens when the mouth-guard containing the bleaching gel (peroxide) does not fit properly and some of it leaks causing painful chemical burns to the mouth, lips, gums and tongue. In extreme cases people have been sick after swallowing the bleaching product.

Clifford Todd Head of Environmental Health at Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council commented:

**“Tooth whitening carried out by anyone who isn’t registered with the GDC (General Dental Council) is illegal, and I would urge anyone who is thinking of getting their teeth whitened – please do your research. Your teeth are too important to risk causing irreparable damage to your mouth and gums.”**

He continued: **“Some services and products promise up to fifteen shades whiter, so you have to ask yourself: what chemicals are they using to get those results? It may not work and could leave you in constant pain with incredibly sensitive teeth when eating or drinking.”**

**“Hydrogen Peroxide is a powerful oxidizing agent that is able to whiten many organic tissues including teeth. However, it can also cause chemical burns if used inappropriately and is a carcinogen with increasing risk of both a chemical burn and malignant transformation at increased concentrations.**

**“The risks of harm would be greater with a non-registered practitioner because they are not trained to recognize circumstances where the use of peroxide-containing products would be detrimental to the subject’s oral health whereas dentists are**