Reviewer's report

Title: Feeding practice and smoking habits as cumulative risk factor for early childhood caries in toddlers. A retrospective study.

Version: 2 Date: 15 January 2013

Reviewer: M Fontana

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Comments for authors:

1) Title: The title does not reflect the entirety of the paper, as supplemental fluoride was also investigated.

2) Abstract: The wording included in the abstract and throughout the manuscript regarding feeding with a percentage of breast milk between 58% and 99% is confusing (probably a more generic wording such as “more than half of the time” would have been more accurate, considering that the source for the data was a recall questionnaire completed by the participant. The reliability of these data and choice of cut off point should be further discussed)

3) Abstract: The inclusion of medium to high caries levels in the abstract need defining (and then discussion in the paper itself) as those are not general terms within dentistry.

4) Introduction: Overall the paper requires small grammatical corrections.

5) Materials and methods: Considering that the breastfeeding practices were collected via a questionnaire, the reliability of collecting breastfeeding times as 58%-99% vs. 1-57% needs to be better defended. 57-58% seems to be a rather unusual time period for the mother to remember. Cut point for breastfeeding is also described in the discussion as a point of controversy between studies. A better explanation of the clinical relevance of the rationale of using this cut point as it relates to this study needs to be provided.

6) Results: It is stated that 122 toddlers were excluded. What are the reasons for exclusion other than not being present?

7) Results: As ICDAS categories are collapsed, what is the reliability of examiners’ assessment of the collapsed ICDAS codes (1-3, 4 and 5-6)? The overall kappa is provided earlier, but it may not be reflective of the combined categories. Why was an ICDAS code of 3-cavitated lesion- collapsed with 1-2 (non cavitated lesions)?

8) Results: The data on fluoride supplementation should be provided in the tables

9) Discussion: Many of the children had caries, the difference was the level as severity as classified by the authors, so that statement that “ECC was more likely
to occur in toddlers who had been fed with formula milk…” What is the relevance of the difference of severity as classified by the authors?

Did the authors measure exposure to other dietary/sugary sources in the diet other than breast milk or formula?

11) How was the questionnaire used in this study validated?

12) Fluoride supplementation is referring to fluoride in tablets/drops or also including other sources? Was this prenatal or postnatal?