Oral Health and Adolescents

Continued focus on oral health during the adolescent period is important. Many childhood risk factors, such as dental decay, often persist and new oral health risk factors, such as potential tobacco use, may emerge during adolescence. A rise in sex hormones during adolescence may also increase the risk for gum disease. Thus, the adolescent period is an opportune time to educate and motivate teenagers to maintain good personal oral hygiene practices, including dental visits and teeth cleanings. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) is a biennial national survey of high school students (grade 9-12), developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health risk behaviors related to the leading causes of injury, violence, morbidity, and mortality among youth. Data are weighted to be statistically representative of high school students statewide.

According to results from the 2013 YRBSS, 32.7 percent of Texas high school students reported that they had not seen a dentist for preventive services (check-up, exam, teeth cleaning) or other dental work during the past 12 months. Below are the 2013 YRBSS findings for lack of dental visit by age group, race/ethnicity, and other health behaviors. These findings suggest that minority students, students who are older, students who engage in unhealthy behaviors, or who, conversely, do not engage in healthy behaviors, are also more likely to go without dental care. Certainly more awareness is required to identify adolescents at risk for not seeing a dentist to ensure good oral hygiene practices and better access to oral health for this group on a regular basis. See YRBSS website at https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/chs/yrbs/ for survey details.

Lack of Dental Visit by Race/Ethnicity, YRBSS 2013

Oral health is one of those aspects of the health care delivery system in which disparities still exist. Minority children are substantially less likely to have access to oral health care than are their non-minority peers. According to results from the 2013 Texas YRBSS, black (36.1%) and Hispanic (36.2%) high school students were significantly more likely to report that they had not seen a dentist in the past 12 months than were White (26.3%) high school students.

Lack of Dental Visit and Drinking Soda, YBRSS 2013

It is well known that there is a strong link between soda consumption and tooth decay. High school students in Texas who reported that they drank a can, bottle, or glass of soda or pop two or more times per day during the past seven days (38.4%) were significantly more likely than those who reported that they had not done so (31.4%) to go without visiting a dentist in the past 12 months.
It has been reported that oral health affects students’ academic performance and poor oral health, dental disease, and tooth pain can put kids at a disadvantage in school. Consistent with this notion, high school students who reported that they had not made mostly As and Bs in school in the past 12 months (43.5%) were significantly more likely to forego dental care than were those who had made mostly As and Bs (29.3%).

**Healthy Behaviors**

*Healthy behaviors* are defined as actions taken by a person to maintain, attain, or regain good health and to prevent disease. Examples of healthy behaviors include exercising regularly and performing well at school.

### Resources


http://dentistry.usc.edu/2012/08/10/poor-oral-health-can-mean-missed-school-lower-grades/
