



## DID YOU KNOW?

### Oral Health and General Health

**Did you know** that recent studies have established a definite link between your oral health and your general health? Keeping your teeth and gums in tip-top condition is a simple important way to maintain good overall health.

**How Does Oral Health Affect General Health?** A 1998 study by the American Academy of Periodontology confirmed that a mouth infection can cause major problems in other parts of the body. Periodontal or gum disease is caused by a bacterial infection that attacks gums, ligaments and bone. These infections, which can cause bleeding, discomfort, and even tooth loss, can eventually enter the blood stream and travel to major organs and begin *new* infections.

Gum disease can contribute to the development of **heart disease** and **stroke**. It can pose a serious risk for people with **diabetes**, **respiratory disease**, and **osteoporosis**.

The National Institute of Dental Research (NIDR) has found a strong association between gum infections and a number of diseases such as diabetes and AIDS. Several studies have shown a link between poor oral health and heart disease. In fact, at least one study concluded that patients with severe gum disease double their risk of a fatal heart attack.

In addition to the rapidly growing recognition of the link between oral and general health, there is an increasing awareness of the potential the mouth holds for assisting in the early diagnosis of diseases. For instance, in AIDS patients and diabetics, oral tissues may reveal the first signs of systemic disease. The saliva in your mouth can also be used as an inexpensive, non-invasive way to diagnose viral hepatitis A, B and C, and detect antibodies for measles, mumps and rubella.

Texas has one of the **lowest** rates of annual dental visits in the country with only **59 percent** of Texans seeing a dentist in 2002.

**What Needs To Be Done?** The Department of State Health Services' Oral Health Group must raise awareness among the general public, health care providers, and elected officials about the connection between oral health and general health. There are simple things individuals can do to ensure good oral health including practicing good oral hygiene by brushing their teeth,

flossing, and seeing a dentist at least annually.

Unfortunately, many Texans do not have access to dental care. The federal government has designated 42 percent of Texas counties as "dental health professional shortage areas." Even where there are enough dentists, many Texans simply cannot afford the visit. Another way to improve oral health and reduce dental disease is increasing access to fluoridated water systems; fluoridation reduces dental disease. Currently, 24-25 percent of Texans live in areas *without* fluoridated water.

**What Are We Doing In Texas To Improve Oral Health?** The Oral Health Group provides preventive dental services for low-income children, promotes water fluoridation and monitors the State's dental health in an effort to keep lawmakers informed.

#### WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Department of State Health Services

Oral Health Group

1100 W. 49th St.

Austin, TX 78756

Telephone (512) 458-7323

Fax (512) 458-7256

<http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/dental/default.htm>