



DID YOU KNOW?

Oral Health Surveillance

Did you know health-related **surveillance systems** collect and monitor data for disease trends and/or outbreaks so that public health personnel can protect the nation's health? Oral health surveillance keeps health officials informed of the public's general oral health status.

How Does Oral Health Surveillance Help Me? The National Oral Health Surveillance System (NOHSS) monitors the level of oral disease in Texas, how they use the oral health care delivery system, and the status of community water fluoridation within the state. NOHSS tracks eight basic oral health surveillance indicators: 1) dental visits, 2) teeth cleaning, 3) complete tooth loss at age 65 or older, 4) percent of the population with fluoridated water, 5) percent of third graders with dental caries (cavities), 6) percent of third graders with untreated dental caries (cavities), 7) percent of third graders with sealants on at least one permanent molar, and 8) number of people with cancer of the oral cavity or throat. These indicators provide a snap-shot of the nation's overall oral health.

Dental surveillance data helps policy makers and public health personnel target available resources to best meet the state's dental health needs.

What Surveillance Data Does Texas Collect? Oral health surveillance data for school-aged children was available for five Texas Health Services Regions (HSR): HSR 1/2 (Lubbock), HSR 3/4/5 (Tyler), HSR 5s/6/7 (Houston), HSR 8/11 (San Antonio), and HSR 9/10 (San Angelo). These data suggest 97 percent of low-income, school aged children in these regions are in need of dental screening and treatment for dental caries. This same surveillance data show that access to dental care varies widely by HSR with 36 percent of Texas counties actually scoring zero on the state dental care access index for low-income children.

Thirty-six percent of Texas counties scored zero (on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 the most access) on the state dental care access index for low-income children.

Texas collects surveillance data from the state's public school systems on oral disease in school-aged children. In 2002, approximately 36 percent of Texas children overall in grades Pre-K through 6th had *untreated* dental caries or cavities. That same year, 46 percent of low-income children had untreated dental caries. Only 60 percent of Texas' adult population saw a dentist in 1999 versus 73 percent of U.S. adults as a whole. In 2000, 17 percent of Texans over 65 had lost all of their teeth. Each year, there are approximately 74 cases of oral and throat cancer per 100,000 population.

How Does Texas Use Dental Surveillance? The Department of State Health Services' Oral Health Group uses the surveillance data it collects to determine what activities will have the greatest positive impact on the state's oral health. The state offers school-based sealants clinics to reduce dental caries. The Oral Health Group also promotes community water fluoridation, educational curriculum for the general public and special populations such as pregnant women and parents of infants and pre-school children. The Oral Health Group recruits Medicaid providers and reviews Medicaid dental services and complaints.

The Oral Health Group's oral health surveillance activities tell us that there is much yet to be done to ensure that Texans have good oral health.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE:

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