
Preface to the Canadian Health Measures Survey results Oral health statistics, 2007–2009¹

Dr. P. Cooney, Chief Dental Officer, Health Canada

*While the eyes are the window to the soul, the mouth is a mirror to the body.*²

Both dental professionals and the general public increasingly understand that oral health is connected to overall health and that oral diseases are chronic diseases in their own right. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “oral diseases share common risk factors with the four leading chronic diseases—cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes—including unhealthy diet, tobacco use, and harmful alcohol use. Poor oral hygiene is also a risk factor.”³

Chronic disease is defined as disease that is long-lasting or recurring; systemic disease refers to disease that affects the whole body. With these definitions in mind, we can classify the two major oral health conditions—periodontal (gum) disease and dental caries (tooth decay)—as both chronic and systemic diseases. Oral diseases can be recurring and long-lasting, and impact overall health, as in the case of painful tooth decay that affects eating and hence nutritional intake. According to WHO, “oral health means being free of chronic mouth and facial pain, oral and throat cancer, oral sores, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay and tooth loss, and other diseases and disorders that affect the mouth and oral cavity.”³

Periodontal diseases and dental caries are the most prevalent chronic diseases, affecting children, adolescents, adults and the elderly.^{4,5} In fact, dental caries affects 60% to 90% of schoolchildren and the vast majority of adults in most industrialized countries.⁶ Among 5-to 17-year-olds, dental decay is five times as common as asthma and seven times as common as hay fever.⁷ Research points to a connection between poor oral health and diabetes as well as respiratory diseases; poor oral health may

also contribute to heart disease, stroke, and the risk of having premature, low birth-weight babies.⁷

Results of systemic disorders, for example, loss of saliva due to radiation treatment or medications, affect conditions in the mouth. Oral signs and symptoms can also be precursors of systemic diseases such as leukoplakia, a white spot or patch on soft tissues in the mouth that may become cancerous.⁸ Many other systemic conditions and illnesses play a role in oral health. Significant examples include malnutrition, osteoporosis, eating disorders, anemia, HIV/AIDS, thyroid disorders and even stress.

The Office of the Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) was created in October 2004 to increase awareness about ways to prevent oral diseases and to improve the oral health status of Canadians. One of OCDO’s top priorities is to collect current statistical information. The Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) was developed in collaboration with Statistics Canada, Health Canada, and the National Department of Defence to collect baseline information on a number of health factors, including oral health; with no national oral health assessment since 1972, there was a great need for this baseline data. The CHMS collected health measures from almost 6000 people, representing 97% of the Canadian population aged 6 to 79, from March 2007 to November 2009. Following the design of the CHMS, four sub-group surveys (First Nations on-reserve, Inuit, seniors, and the homeless in Toronto) have been or are in the process of being completed.

The results from the oral health component of the CHMS, along with the results expected from the other sub-group surveys on oral health, means that public health dental professionals now have a real understanding of the current status

of oral health in Canada. This information will allow us to develop informed policies to address the true oral health needs of Canadians. I hope that you as readers will use this information and research to better understand the connections between oral health and other health issues, and to explore these connections with the goal of improving the oral health and hence the overall health of Canadians.

References

1. Health Canada. Canadian Health Measures Survey, Report on the Findings of the Oral Health Module of the Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007-2009. Ottawa (ON): Health Canada; 2010 [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Available from: <http://www.fptdwc.ca/English/e-documents.html>
2. US Department of Health and Human Services. Oral health in America: A report of the Surgeon-General [Internet]. Rockville (MD): US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health; 2000 [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Executive Summary. Available from: <http://www2.nidcr.nih.gov/sgr/execsumm.htm#execSumm>
3. World Health Organization. Fact sheet number 318: Oral health [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2007 Feb [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs318/en/index.html>
4. Ismail AI, Lewis DW, Dingle JL. Prevention of periodontal disease. In: The Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Examination. The Canadian guide to clinical preventive health care [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Public Health Agency of Canada; 1994 [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Chapter 37, p. 420-31. Available from: <http://www/phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/clinic-clinique/s4c37e.pdf>

-
5. Health Canada. Report on the findings of the oral health component of the Canadian Health Measures Survey, 2007-2009. Ottawa (ON): Health Canada; 2010. Table 28, Prevalence and severity of coronal caries—dentate adults; p. 96. Available from: <http://www.fptdwc.ca/assets/PDF/CHMS/CHMS-E-summ.pdf>
 6. World Health Organization. Oral health: policy basis [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010 [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Available from: http://www.who.int/oral_health/policy/en/
 7. Locker D, Matear D. Oral disorders, systemic health, well-being and the quality of life: A summary of recent research evidence. Toronto (ON): University of Toronto; [2010?] [cited 2010 Jun 1]. Available from: http://www.utoronto.ca/dentistry/facultyresearch/dri/cdhsru/health_measurement/7.%20%20No%2017.pdf
 8. Poh CF, Williams PM, Zhang L, Rosin MP. Heads Up! — A Call for Dentists to Screen for Oral Cancer [Internet]. Journal of the Canadian Dental Association. 2006 [cited 2010 Jun 29];72(5):413-6. Available from: http://oralcancerfoundation.org/dental/pdf/call_to_action-canada.pdf