

Oral Health, 2012

Oral health is important for overall health.¹ Good oral health helps us smile, speak, chew, smell, taste, swallow, touch, and make facial expressions that show emotions and feelings. Examples of oral diseases include cavities, gum disease, and mouth and throat cancers. Gum disease, in particular, has been linked to chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Gum disease in pregnant women has been associated with low birth weight and premature birth. Regular dental care can help prevent many oral diseases.²

A 2011-2012 survey estimated that one in 10 Maine children age 1-17 years (13.3%) had one or more oral health problems in the past year, which was significantly lower than the nationwide estimate of 18.7%.³ Four of every five Maine children (80.5%) had seen a dentist for preventive care in the prior 12 months, significantly better than the U.S. figure of 77.2%.³ The percentage of Maine adults aged 18 years and older who reported visiting a dentist or dental clinic for any reason in the past year was unchanged between 1999 and 2010 (69.8% and 68.7%, respectively).⁴ In 2010, one of every five Mainers aged 65 or older (20.7%) reported having had all of their natural teeth removed due to gum disease or tooth decay, which was a significant improvement over 35.7% in 1999.⁴

Oral health related measures chosen for the State Health Assessment include:⁵

- Adults with 6 or more teeth lost
- Adults with dental care in past year
- Children with treated dental caries and untreated dental cavities

Additional measures related to protective factors, risk factors, or diseases related to oral health can be found in several sections of the State Health Assessment, including Environmental Health, Tobacco Use, Substance Abuse, Diabetes, and Cardiovascular Disease.



Prevalence estimates for oral health measures included in the State Health Assessment vary across population groups in Maine. For example, males aged 18 years and older were significantly less likely than females to have received some type of dental care in the past year. Adults with less education or income were significantly more likely to have had six or more teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease than were adults with more education or income. Adults who were non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native were significantly less likely than non-Hispanic White adults to have received some type of dental care in the past year. While some oral health measures varied by county or Public Health District, no one county or district was consistently at increased risk.⁵

Healthy Maine 2020 also has objectives related to oral health, including:⁶

- Increase proportion of adults 18+ with dental insurance
- Reduce the proportion of individuals who are unable to obtain or delay obtaining necessary dental care
- Reduce the proportion of children who have dental caries experience in their primary or permanent teeth

- ¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2020. Oral health: overview. Available from: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=32> (accessed 6/3/2013).
- ² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2020. Leading health indicators: oral health overview and impact. Available from: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/LHI/oralHealth.aspx> (accessed 6/3/2013).
- ³ National Survey of Children’s Health, 2011/12. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health. Available from: <http://www.childhealthdata.org/> (accessed 6/3/2013).
- ⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System: prevalence and trends data. Available from: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/> (accessed 6/3/2013).
- ⁵ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. State health assessment – 2012. Available from: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/phdata/sha/index.shtml> (accessed 6/3/2013).
- ⁶ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Maine 2020. Available from: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/healthy-maine/index.shtml>.