



the burden of oral disease

Adults

Oral Disease in Adults

The oral health of adults is very important to overall health and quality of life. For adults ages 20-64, 84.3% have had some form of dental restoration.¹ It is estimated that American adults lose at least 164 million hours of work each year due to dental issues and visits.²

In adulthood, dental caries (tooth decay) is a prominent source of oral disease. In the United States, 23.7% of adults aged 20-64 have untreated tooth decay.¹ Drastic differences exist on this measure in relation to socioeconomic status. For adults that live at income levels below 100% of the federal poverty level, 41.9% have untreated tooth decay.¹ For adults in households with incomes at 200% or more of the federal poverty level, only 16.6% have untreated decay.¹

Periodontal (gum) disease is another oral health concern for many adults. The less severe stages of the disease, gingivitis and mild periodontitis, are common.² For American adults over the age of 30, 45.9% have some form of periodontal disease.³ Severe periodontitis affects 9% of adults.³ The proportion of individuals suffering from periodontal disease increases with age and the condition is more common in men than in women.²

Oral cancer is also a concern for some adults. While oropharyngeal cancers are more common in older adults, they can occur in adults of all ages. Adults who frequently use tobacco or alcohol products are particularly at risk.⁴

Additionally, the oral health of adults can have direct ties to other chronic conditions. Individuals with diabetes are more susceptible to periodontal disease, and periodontitis may be a risk factor for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and stroke.²

Risk and Protective Factors for Oral Disease in Adults

Tobacco use is a major risk factor for oral disease in adults. According to the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 18.5% of Iowa adults are current smokers and 5.2% currently use chewing tobacco, snuff, or snus.⁵ Tobacco use increases the risk for oral cancers and periodontitis.² Additionally, smokeless tobacco use can increase the risk for oral lesions and cancers of the lip, cheek, and tongue.²

Adults can protect themselves from tooth decay and periodontal disease by adopting proper oral hygiene practices. These include daily brushing with fluoridated toothpaste, flossing, and drinking fluoridated water.² Adults should also limit their intake of sugary foods and beverages. As is consistent throughout the lifespan, these practices can reduce the risk for dental caries.⁶

It is also important that adults receive routine professional dental cleanings and exams. Regular dental visits are crucial for preventing dental disease, identifying issues to prevent them from worsening, and detecting the first signs of oral cancer.⁶ Adults are less likely than children to receive routine dental care and this limits an adult's ability to benefit from this key prevention activity.⁷

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How is Iowa Doing?

One of the goals of Healthy People 2020 is to increase the proportion of children, adolescents, and adults who use the oral health care system in the past year to 49%. According to the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 69.4% of Iowa adults visited the dentist or a dental clinic within the past year.⁵ This is better than the national rate of 65.3%.⁵

Healthy People 2020 set the objective to decrease the number of 45-64 year old adults who have had a permanent tooth extracted due to dental caries or periodontal disease to 68.8%.⁸ For Iowa adults of this same age range, only 49.7% have had at least one permanent tooth extracted.⁵ Iowa has met this Healthy People objective.

Healthy People 2020 has also made oral cancer a priority. They set the goal to reduce the oropharyngeal cancer death rate to 2.3 deaths per 100,000 population.⁸ The state of Iowa has met this goal, with an annual death rate of 2.2 per 100,000 population over the 2008-2012 time period.⁹ This translates to an average of 81 Iowans dying each year from a cancer of the oral cavity or pharynx.⁹ The death rate for adults under 65 years for this same time period was 1.0 deaths per 100,000 population.⁹

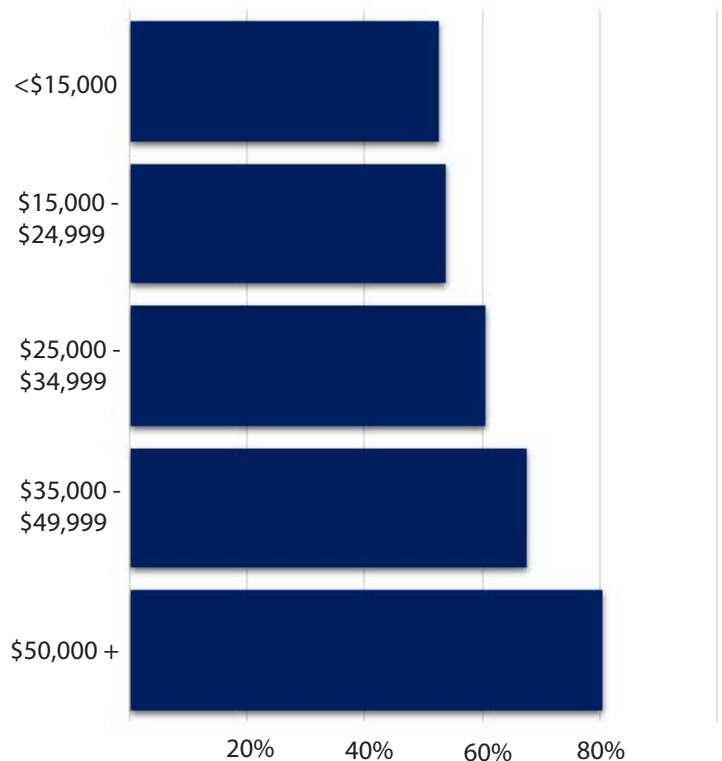
What is Iowa Doing?

On May 1, 2014, Iowa began a new dental insurance program for low-income adults. Titled the Dental Wellness Plan, this insurance option allows adults aged 19-64 and with household incomes between 0 and 133% of the federal poverty level to receive comprehensive dental benefits.¹⁰ This provides many previously uninsured adults access to diagnostic, preventive, and emergency dental care.¹⁰

The Governor's Healthiest State Initiative has also made an effort to improve the oral health of adults. This initiative's "get your bib on" campaign encourages Iowans to visit the dentist and make oral health a priority.¹¹



PERCENT OF ADULTS WHO HAVE BEEN TO DENTIST IN LAST YEAR BY INCOME



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey 2014
Includes adults 18 and older who answered that they have been to the dentist in the last year in 2014, by self-reported household income.

This publication was supported by Grant #5U58DP004880-02, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Fact sheet references and additional information can be found at <https://idph.iowa.gov/ohds/oral-health-center/reports>