Healthy Children, Healthy State:

Child Oral Health in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

ORAL HYGIENE HABITS AMONG TEXAS CHILDREN ARE INCONSISTENT

Establishing good oral hygiene habits in childhood, such as daily flossing, brushing twice a day, and maintaining regular dental visits, fosters lifelong health outcomes, including reduced risk of cavities, gum disease, and enhanced quality of life.

Poor oral hygiene in childhood is associated with chronic disease and other adverse health consequences later in life.

Oral Health of Texas Children

Oral hygiene habits among Texas children are inconsistent.

22% of Texas students did not brush their teeth at least twice daily, and **17%** did not visit a dentist in the past 12 months.

25% of **male** students did not brush at least twice daily and **19%** did not visit a dentist, compared to **18%** and **15%** of **female** students.

23% of **Grade 2** students in **border** regions did not brush at least twice daily compared to **26%** in **non-border** regions.

23% of **rural** students did not brush at least twice daily.

24% of **Grade 11** students in **border** regions did not visit a dentist in the last 12 months compared to **20%** in **non-border** regions.

Similarly, **27%** of **rural** students in **Grade 11** reported not visiting a dentist in the last 12 months.

Why Oral Health Matters

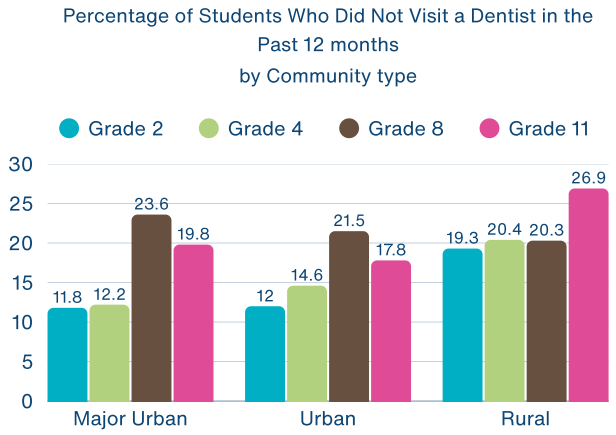
Inadequate oral hygiene is associated with avdverse health outcomes in childeren, including:

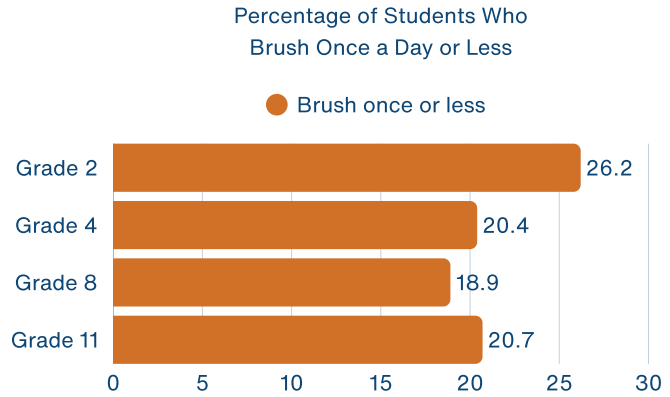
- Higher risk of dental caries (cavities)
- Increased risk of gum disease
- Pain and discomfort, affecting daily activities
- Difficulty eating, impacting nutrition and dietary habits
- Impacts on academic performance and psychosocial development (confidence, social well-being)
- Increased need for dental treatment

Poor oral health, particularly periodontal (gum) disease, is associated with chronic systemic diseases through inflammation and bacterial spread.

- Key associations in the short and long-term include:
  - Diabetes
  - Cardiovascular disease (heart disease, stroke)
  - Respiratory infections
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Chronic kidney disease

Student Oral Health Behaviors by Grade





UTHealth Houston School of Public Health

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Texas SPAN Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey

Guidelines for Good Oral Health

1. Brush Regularly

Brush teeth twice daily morning and night, for at least **two minutes** each time.

Use a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste to effectively clean teeth and gums.

2. Floss Daily

Floss once a day to remove plaque and food particles from between teeth and along the gumline.

Teach children proper techniques and encourage it as part of a daily routine.

3. Healthy Diet, Healthy Smile

Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Limit sugary snacks and beverages **especially before bedtime** and avoid frequent snacking or sipping on sugary beverages throughout the day.

4. Regular Dental Checkups

Schedule the first dental visit by age one (or within **6 months** of the first tooth erupting), and continue routine visits every **6 months** for cleanings and checkups.

Early detection and preventive care are essential for maintaining optimal oral health.

Public Health Strategies

School-based programs can improve children's oral health by building daily habits in a structured environment.

Programs such as **CATCH Healthy Smiles**, an evidence-based program, demonstrate how these interventions can support children's oral health.

CATCH Healthy Smiles

Key Strategies Include:

- Integrate brushing lessons into the curriculum
- Supervise toothbrushing routines at school
- Promote healthy eating habits
- Engage families with take-home materials to reinforce habits

References

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About: Texas Child Health Status Report

These reports utilize state-level data from the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (Texas SPAN) Project 2021-2023 to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health.

Learn more at go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth

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