

International Implications of “Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General”

While the US surgeon general's report* on oral health in America is specific to one country, the majority of its contents are applicable to the rest of the world. Dentistry is vital to the health of the world's population, and the report contains a wealth of information for dental providers, social and health planners, and governmental agencies throughout the planet.

As economic conditions have improved in the more advanced nations of the world, toothache and tooth loss have diminished dramatically. Much remains to be done, however, in eliminating barriers to quality-of-life choices for the world's disadvantaged population. It is axiomatic that parents wish their children to have all possible advantages. One of the most important advantages is to begin life with optimal health and maintain it for a lifetime. The report offers multiple strategies to do just that.

The report stresses and verifies 4 fundamental themes:

1. Oral health is much more than healthy teeth.
2. Oral health is integral to general health.
3. Safe and effective disease prevention measures exist that everyone can adopt to improve oral health and prevent disease.
4. General health risk factors, such as tobacco use and poor dietary practices, also affect oral and craniofacial health.

The report is organized into 5 parts, 4 of which are applicable to the world:

1. What is oral health?
2. What is the status of oral health in America?
3. What is the relationship between oral health and general health and well-being?
4. How is oral health promoted and maintained, and how are oral diseases prevented?
5. What are the needs and opportunities to enhance oral health?

*See <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sgr/execsumm.htm> for the executive summary and <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sgr/oralhealth.htm> for the full report.

See also: US Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

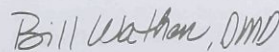
There are 8 major findings:

1. Oral diseases and disorders in and of themselves affect health and well-being throughout life.
2. Safe and effective measures exist to prevent the most common dental diseases—dental caries and periodontal diseases.
3. Lifestyle behaviors that affect general health—such as tobacco use, excessive alcohol use, and poor dietary choices—affect oral and craniofacial health as well.
4. There are profound and consequential oral health disparities within the US population.
5. More information is needed to improve America's oral health and eliminate health disparities.
6. The mouth reflects general health and well-being.
7. Oral diseases and conditions are associated with other health problems.
8. Scientific research is key to further reduction in the burden of diseases and disorders that affect the face, mouth, and teeth.

The findings yield 5 proposed action steps:

1. Change perceptions regarding oral health and disease so that oral health becomes an accepted component of general health.
2. Accelerate the building of the science and evidence base and apply science effectively to improve oral health.
3. Build an effective health infrastructure that meets the oral health needs of all Americans and integrates oral health effectively into overall health.
4. Remove known barriers between people and oral health services.
5. Use public-private partnerships to improve the oral health of those who still suffer disproportionately from oral diseases.

We have written before about the wisdom in establishing our practices as important oral health science resources in our respective communities. The US surgeon general's report is filled with information that helps accomplish that.



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