



Good Oral Health is Important

Oral health means more than strong teeth! Did you know...

- oral health problems are common in people with HIV.
- oral health problems can be **prevented** and **treated**!



Oral health—the health of your teeth, gums, and mouth—affects your whole body.

Oral health care is an important part of your HIV care. Oral health problems put more strain on your immune system. Some oral health problems are a sign that your immune system is changing and may mean that you should see your doctor. Your dentist needs to know that you have HIV in order to give you the best care. He or she can work with your doctor or clinic to make sure you get the treatment you need.

Oral health problems may raise your risk of heart disease, lung disease, and stroke. In pregnant women, oral health problems may raise the risk of having a low-weight, premature baby.

Two types of oral health problems are:

- ✓ problems with your teeth and gums
- ✓ infections and sores inside your mouth

Almost everyone has tooth and gum problems at some time in their lives. The most common are **cavities** and **gum disease**.

Cavities (sometimes called caries)

A cavity is a soft spot or small hole in your tooth. Cavities are caused by *plaque*, a sticky white film on your teeth that is made up of bacteria (germs) and tiny bits of food left in your mouth. These bacteria make acid that eats away at your teeth.





Cleaning your teeth regularly helps prevent cavities by getting rid of plaque.

At first, a cavity is small and does not hurt. If it is not treated with a filling, it can get deeper, become painful, and a root canal may be needed to fix the tooth. If a cavity is not treated, it can lead to dangerous mouth infections and loss of the tooth.

Gum Disease



Gum disease is an infection of your gums and the bone that holds your teeth in your mouth. Signs of gum disease are:

- ✓ red or swollen gums
- ✓ gums that bleed when you brush or floss your teeth
- ✓ gums that are pulling away from your teeth
- ✓ loose teeth

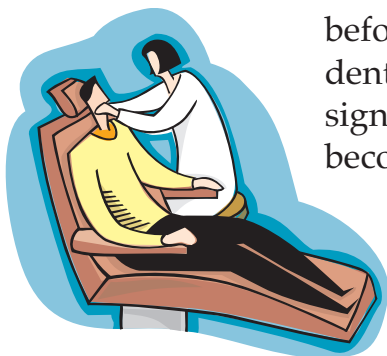
If gum disease is not treated, your teeth—even healthy ones—may shift or get so loose that they need to be removed. Early treatment can help you keep your teeth.

People with HIV sometimes have gum disease that gets worse very quickly. **All** kinds of gum disease are easier to treat when they first begin. That's why it is so important to see your dentist regularly.

You can prevent cavities and gum disease

Cavities and gum disease can happen to anyone. The good news is that you can prevent these problems by following these easy steps:

- ✓ **See your dentist every 6 months for a checkup, even if your teeth feel fine.**



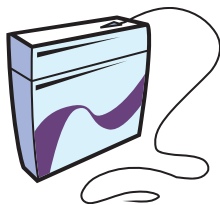
Your dentist can find and fix cavities before they cause you pain. Your dentist can also find and treat early signs of gum disease before it becomes serious. Early treatment means less pain! Your dentist also checks for mouth infections, sores, and cancer, so you should go even if you have no teeth.

- ✓ **Brush your teeth after every meal, or at least 2 times a day.**

Choose a toothpaste with fluoride and use a soft-bristle toothbrush. Change your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months, or sooner if the bristles look frayed or worn.

- ✓ **Floss every day.**

Flossing cleans parts of your teeth that your toothbrush can't reach. If you have trouble using floss, ask your dentist to show you ways to clean between your teeth.





✓ **Use a mouth rinse every day.**

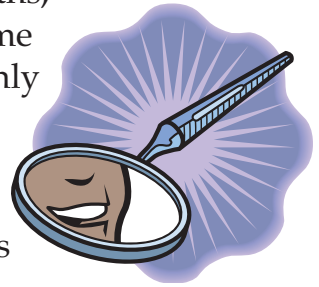
Ask your dentist if there is a specific mouth rinse you should use.

✓ **Use artificial saliva if you have a dry mouth.**

Dry mouth is a side effect of many HIV medications. Saliva helps keep your teeth clean, so you are more likely to get cavities if you have a dry mouth. An artificial saliva will make your mouth more comfortable and will help prevent oral health problems caused by dry mouth. You can buy this at your local pharmacy without a prescription, or ask your dentist for a recommendation.

Mouth sores & infections

People with HIV are more likely to have some kinds of sores and infections inside their mouths, including on the tongue and lips. Some of these infections are rare and can only be found by your dentist. Others are more common and may have symptoms you can see or feel. The most common kinds of sores and infections that affect people with HIV are:



- ✓ **Thrush** (Candidiasis)
- ✓ **Oral Hairy Leukoplakia**
- ✓ **Mouth Ulcers** (Canker sores, cold sores, or fever blisters)

Thrush (Candidiasis)

Candidiasis is a fungal infection that may appear in your mouth. Candidiasis may look like:



- white patches in your mouth that can be wiped off
- a flat red sore that burns, especially when you eat spicy or salty foods
- cracks in the corners of your mouth

Candidiasis can be treated with prescription mouth rinses, pills, or lozenges (pills you suck on instead of swallowing). If thrush is not treated, it can spread down your throat. Then you may need more complex treatment or even hospitalization. Early treatment is best.

Oral Hairy Leukoplakia



Oral hairy leukoplakia:

- looks like white patches that do not wipe off
- is usually found along the sides of your tongue
- is not painful

Oral hairy leukoplakia usually does not need to be treated. If it becomes severe, your dentist can provide medications or other treatments.



Mouth Sores

Mouth sores include canker sores and cold sores (also called fever blisters). Mouth sores are common, even in people who do not have HIV. But people with HIV may have larger, more painful sores that take much longer to heal. If you have a sore that does not go away in 7 to 10 days, see your dentist.



To reduce pain from mouth sores:

- avoid acidic foods (like orange juice or tomatoes)
- avoid spicy foods (like hot sauce)
- ask your dentist about over-the-counter medications

Your dentist may also prescribe medication to treat some kinds of mouth sores.

Mouth Self-Checks

Take some time at least once a month to look inside your mouth for signs of infections and sores. Check your:

- tongue (top and bottom)
- lips
- gums
- cheeks
- roof of the mouth

See your dentist if you find:

- white, purple, or red patches
- painful sores
- bumps
- sores that do not heal after 7 to 10 days

Early treatment can prevent some problems from getting worse. Plus, some of these sores can hurt or make eating and drinking uncomfortable. The sooner your dentist treats you, the sooner you will feel better.

To find a dentist...

Ask your doctor, nurse, social worker, or case manager for the name and number of a dentist. They may even be able to make the appointment for you. The New York State Department of Health also prints an HIV Oral Health Resource Directory.

To order a copy, call (212) 268-6164 or send an email to HIVPUBS@health.state.ny.us.



In New York State, oral health care is covered by **Medicaid** and **ADAP Plus**. Your case manager can tell you more about these and other programs to help you get free or low-cost care.





For more information...

...about HIV and AIDS

NYS Department of Health HIV / AIDS Hotlines

1-800-541-AIDS (English)

1-800-233-SIDA (Spanish)

1-800-369-AIDS (Deaf/TDD)

HIV Clinical Guidelines

www.hivguidelines.org

NYS Department of Health website

www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/aids/index.htm

...about oral health

American Dental Association website

www.ada.org

CDC website on Oral Health

www.cdc.gov/OralHealth

...about ADAP and ADAP Plus

ADAP Information

www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/hiv aids/adap/progsummary.htm

1-800-542-2437

...about Medicaid

Medicaid Helpline

1-518-486-9057

Medicaid CHOICE (for information about Special Needs Plans for people with HIV on Medicaid)

1-800-505-5678

1-888-329-1541 TTY/TDD



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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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