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**ORAL HEALTH – A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE**

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28 May 2012

**Oral health**

World Health Organization defines oral health as being free of chronic mouth and facial pain, oral and throat cancer, oral sores, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay and tooth loss, and other diseases and disorders that affect the mouth and oral cavity.

**Oral disease**

- Oral diseases are among the most prevalent chronic diseases.
- They include tooth decay and gum diseases that can lead to pain and tooth loss.
- Oral cancer leads to pain, tooth loss and premature death if not detected early on.
- Oral diseases—once considered localized infections—are now associated with other diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.<sup>1</sup>
- Oral disease and pain can have a significant negative impact on your ability to learn, work, socialize, speak and eat foods that you need.

**Did you know?**

- You can't be healthy without good oral health.
- Tooth decay is the most common disease of childhood—decay in children's primary teeth predicts future decay in adult teeth.
- Tooth decay can continue throughout your lifetime.
- In some areas in Canada, dental procedures under general anesthesia are the most common surgical procedures that children receive in hospitals.<sup>2</sup>
- Canadians spend 13 billion dollars a year on oral health care, diseases, and injuries that are almost all preventable. In terms of costs associated with disease categories, oral health care follows cardiovascular disease and exceeds costs for respiratory disease and cancer.<sup>3,6</sup>
- About 32% of Canadians have no dental insurance and this number increases with age.<sup>4</sup>

- If you smoke, drink alcohol excessively, or have diabetes, then your chances of developing gum diseases are higher. Smoking, alcohol consumption and oral sex also increase your risk for oral cancer.
- Limited income and education are risk factors for high rates of oral disease.
- Government spending on oral health has decreased from 11% in 1984 to 8% in 2011, resulting in a greater cost for the individual.<sup>5,6</sup>

**What can each of us do?**

- Public health solutions for oral diseases are most effective when they are integrated with other chronic diseases and with national public health programs<sup>7</sup>.
- Oral disease and injuries are preventable. Take control of your oral health with a healthy diet, daily personal oral hygiene and visits to your oral health professional. When playing sports wear a sports mouth guard.
- Join your local dental professionals and advocate for public investments in oral health promotion and disease prevention programs such as school screenings, dental sealants, water fluoridation and injury prevention, and support increased public funding for vulnerable populations.

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7. Petersen PE (2008) WHO global policy for improvement of oral health. International Dental Journal 58(3): 115-121

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**SUPPORT PUBLIC HEALTH!**

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This message brought to you by the Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CCPH21)  
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# Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century

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## Coalition canadienne pour la santé publique au 21e siècle

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