

CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH 2003

Introduction

Children's Dental Health 2003 is one of an ongoing series of health status reports published by the Region of Peel Health department to describe the health of the Region's population.



Oral health plays an important role in general health and quality of life. While they are seldom life threatening, oral diseases cause undue pain and suffering that can impact on the psychological and social well-being of the individual affected. There is increasing evidence of a link between oral conditions and systemic diseases. Periodontal diseases (also referred to as gum infections) have been associated with diabetes, low birth weight, premature births, heart disease and stroke.

Among children, dental diseases can lead to abscesses in the mouth and undue pain, which can affect eating, sleeping and general growth and development. The impact of childhood dental diseases includes lost school days and work hours. In the United States, it has been estimated that 51 million school hours per year are lost because of dental illnesses.¹ This would be equivalent to five million or more lost school hours for Canadian children. Treatment of these conditions, especially among the very young, can be costly and often requires hospitalization. It is estimated that in 1993, Canadians spent nearly \$4.7 billion on dental care.² The most current Canadian estimate is in excess of \$6 billion.³

While most Canadians enjoy good oral health, the burden of oral disease is unevenly distributed in the population. One of the principal roles of Public Health is to monitor the health status of the community. This is accomplished in several ways: periodic surveys, reviews of existing information and screening for specified conditions. Unfortunately, monitoring of oral health in the community by public health has been traditionally limited in its scope by focusing on children. Data are usually collected from school-aged children in elementary schools.

This report describes results from the *Peel Dental Health Indices* survey which collected data during 2001 and 2002 from a sample of over 4,000 children in senior kindergarten and grades 2, 4, 6 and 8 in each of the Region's municipalities. This sample included 1,622 children from Brampton, 602 from Caledon and 1,803 from Mississauga.

Children's Dental Health 2003 covers information on the following topics:

- Dental disease in children
- Risk factors for dental disease
- Fluorides in caries prevention
- Access to dental care

Confidence intervals were calculated to determine whether estimates by municipality were statistically similar or different. When estimates were “statistically different”, terms such as “statistically lower” or “statistically higher” are used.

For more details about the methodology underlying this survey, please refer to Data Sources and Methods on page 23.