Gum disease a significant public health concern

The prevalence of periodontal disease in the United States may be significantly higher than originally estimated. Research published in the Journal of Dental Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) suggests that the prevalence of periodontal disease may have been underestimated by as much as 50 percent. The implication is that more American adults may suffer from moderate to severe gum disease than previously thought.

In a National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) pilot study, funded by the CDC’s Division of Oral Health, a full-mouth, comprehensive periodontal examination was conducted on over 450 adults over the age of 55. Periodontal disease was classified according to definitions determined by the CDC in collaboration with the AAP.

The prevalence rates were then compared against the results of previous NHANES studies, which used a partial-mouth periodontal examination. Historically, NHANES has served as the main source for determining prevalence of periodontal disease in U.S. adults. The pilot study finds that the original partial-mouth study methodology may have underestimated true disease prevalence by up to 50 percent.

Several research studies have associated gum disease with other chronic inflammatory diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

“This study shows that periodontal disease is a bigger problem than we all thought. It is a call to action for anyone who cares about his or her oral health,” said Samuel Low, DDS, MS, associate dean and professor of periodontology at the University of Florida College of Dentistry and president of the AAP.

“Given what we know about the relationship between gum disease and other diseases, taking care of your oral health isn’t just about a pretty smile. It has bigger implications for overall health, and is therefore a more significant public health problem,” Low added.

Low explained that the increased prevalence of periodontal disease makes it essential to maintain healthy teeth and gums. “Not only should you

ADA conference seeks solutions for older adults

The American Dental Association (ADA) is extending invitations to those concerned about the oral health of vulnerable older adults and people with disabilities to attend a national conference and help shape the future of oral health care for this underserved and growing population.

The national coalition conference, titled Oral Health of Vulnerable Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities, is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 18, at the JW Marriott in Washington, D.C.

“We look upon this conference as the first step in building a consensus among a multi-disciplinary group of professionals in seeking solutions about oral health care for the vulnerable older adult and the disabled,” said Dr. Raymond F. Gist, ADA president.

“We are looking for attendees’ ideas, collaboration and support in

Oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) is the most common malignancy of the oral cavity and has several known variants. The papillary variant of OSCC affecting the palate is rare compared to more common sites of involvement that include the larynx, pharynx and nasopharynx.

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Papillary squamous cell carcinoma

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take good care of your periodontal health with daily tooth brushing and flossing, you should expect to get a comprehensive periodontal evaluation every year,” he advised.

According to Paul Eke, MPH, PhD, epidemiologist at the CDC and lead author of the study, the findings have significant public health implications. “The study suggests we have likely underestimated the prevalence of periodontal disease in the adult U.S. population,” he said. “We are currently utilizing a full-mouth periodontal examination in the 2009/10 NHANES to better understand the full extent and characteristics of periodontal disease in our adult population.”

Eke added, “Research suggests a connection between periodontal health and systemic health. In light of these findings, understanding the relationships between periodontal disease and other systemic diseases in the adult U.S. population is more crucial than ever.”

Patients can assess their risk for periodontal disease and learn more by visiting perio.org.

About the AAP

The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) is the professional organization for periodontists. Periodontists are also dentistry’s experts in the treatment of oral inflammation. They receive three additional years of specialized training following dental school. The AAP has 8,000 members worldwide.

Helping frame the conference’s recommendations that could be used by many sectors, including educational institutions, professional organizations and policy makers.

Professionals concerned about oral health for vulnerable older adults and people with disabilities, including dentists and dental hygienists, geriatricians, nurses, oral health advocates, aging and disability advocates, long-term care providers and policy makers and legislative staff, are encouraged to register for the conference.

Dental experts will present topics of critical importance in meeting the oral health needs of special populations, including collaboration between disciplines, oral health delivery systems, policy implications, medical dental considerations and coalition building.

Responding to each presentation will be an expert from outside dentistry, representing geriatric medicine, long-term care, aging advocacy, state health and policymakers.

Active audience participation will follow as attendees have the opportunity to provide input as they discuss the presentations.

“The conference is a unique opportunity to help shape the future of oral health care and improve the quality of life for vulnerable older adults and those with disabilities,” said Gist. “We highly encourage those interested professionals to attend.”

Tell us what you think!

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Asthmatic kids and tooth decay

In the past, there have been suggestions that asthma and tooth decay were linked, especially for children. But according to a new report from the American Dental Association, that is apparently not the case. A critical review of the literature examined 27 separate studies published in 29 different papers between 1976 and March 2010.

The studies looked into possible connections between asthma and dental caries.

Gerardo Maupomé, professor of preventive and community dentistry at the Indiana University School of Dentistry and author of the new study, said: “We found little evidence to suggest that asthma causes tooth decay. In fact, the two largest studies we reviewed found that children with asthma appear to have fewer cavities than others. This may be because their parents are used to taking them to health-care providers, and routinely bring them to the dentist.”

“The notion that there is a link between asthma and tooth decay may have its origin in anecdotal statements by emergency room workers who see children with poorly managed asthma,” Maupomé said. “These children could also be more likely to have poorly managed dental conditions, and therefore tooth decay. It’s reasonable to believe that poor clinical management may be associated with both conditions, not the asthma that is causing the cavities.”

The study does acknowledge that it is difficult to explicitly determine if there is a connection between asthma and dental decay — predominately because of the large number of variables related to asthma, including the wide range of treatments for the illness and the severity of asthma symptoms. Yet, researchers suggest there is no need for parents with asthmatic children to be concerned.

However, children who use nebulizers to control their asthma may be increasing their exposure to sugars, as nebulizers often contain fructose. Frequent intake of sugar can lead to tooth decay as the sugar reacts with the plaque on teeth and forms an acid that gradually dissolves the protective enamel coating on the teeth.

Dr. Nigel Carter, chief executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, advises the best way to protect children’s teeth from decay is to make sure they brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. It is also important to cut down how often sugar occurs in a child’s diet.

Carter said: “It is vital that children brush their teeth both morning and night for two minutes with

Tell us what you think!