



# Oral Health

Oral health involves more than just teeth. It also includes the condition of the muscles, joints, ligaments, tissues and bones of the mouth, as well as the lips, tongue, salivary glands and throat. Good habits, such as regular brushing, flossing and dental check-ups, are important in preventing cavities, gum disease and other problems. Without proper prevention and treatment, oral health problems can lead to pain, suffering and disease.

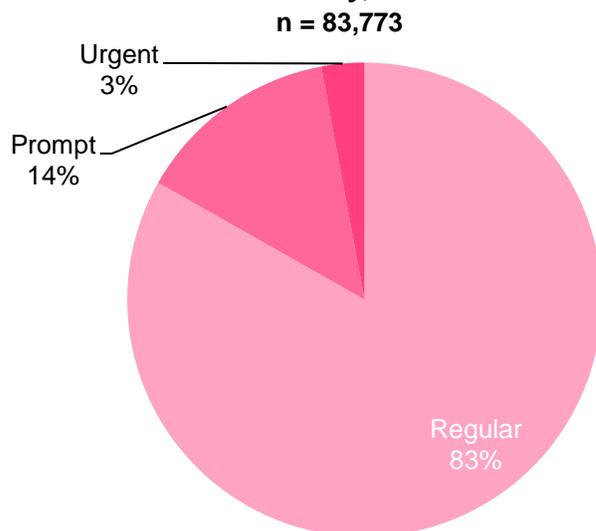
Oral diseases can worsen other diseases and conditions or can become worse due to other diseases and conditions. Oral health can also serve as an early warning system for people suffering from certain conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity. Pregnant women who have gum disease are at a higher risk of having a premature birth or low birth weight baby than pregnant women without gum disease.

There is not a survey that captures the oral health status of DeKalb County residents. Consequently, this section provides data from several sources to offer at least some information on this important aspect of health.

## ORAL HEALTH AMONG CHILDREN

From 2008 through 2012, the DeKalb County Board of Health's Dental Health Program evaluated 83,773 children. Among the children, three different levels of care were needed. Regular dental care was indicated when there were no obvious problems. Prompt care was indicated when the child had cavities or gum problems, but was not in pain. Urgent care was indicated when the child had pain, infection or swelling. Each year, between 15 and 19 percent of the children required prompt or urgent dental care (see Figure 64).

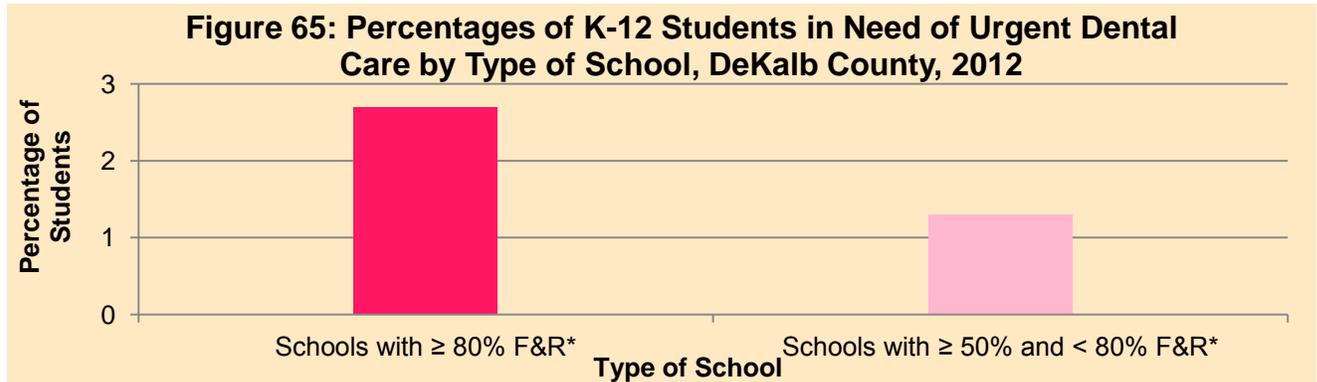
**Figure 64: Percentages of Pre-K to Grade 12 Children who Received Oral Health Screenings by Type of Dental Care Needed, DeKalb County, 2008-2012**



Source: Dental Health Program, DeKalb County Board of Health, 2014.

Figure 65 shows that:

- In DeKalb County public schools where 80 percent or more of the students received free or reduced price lunch, there was a notably higher percentage of students in need of urgent dental care compared to schools in which 50 to 80 percent of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch.



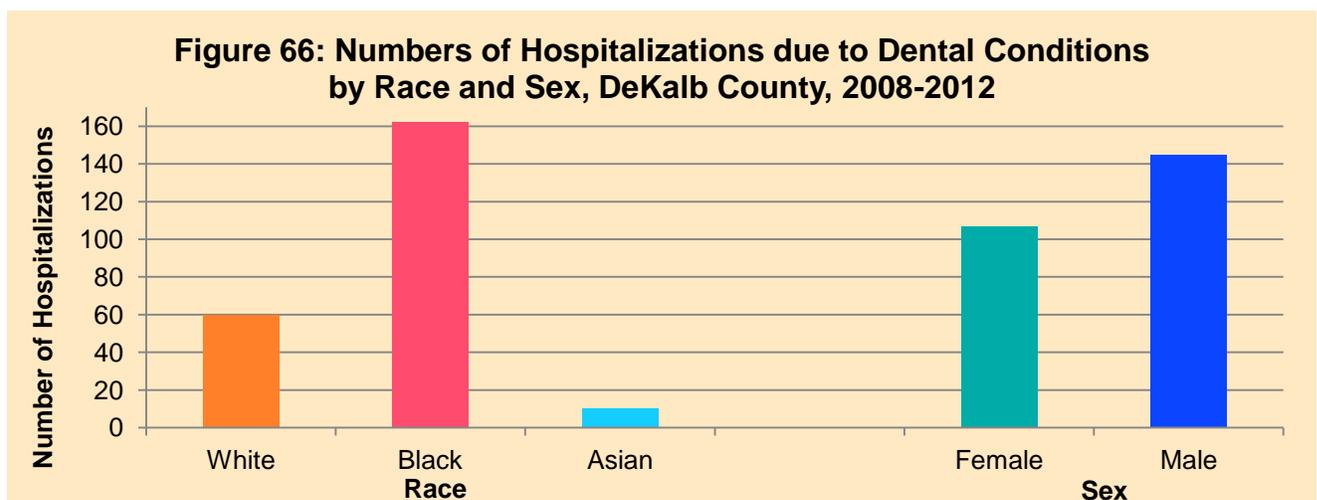
\*Free and reduced price lunch recipients. Sources: Dental Health Program, DeKalb County Board of Health; Free and Reduced Lunch - Fiscal Year 2012 Data Report, Georgia Department of Education, 2014.

## ORAL HEALTH AMONG ADULTS

Like children, adults can experience tooth decay, cavities and gum problems. In addition, adults may develop cavities on root surfaces, as these areas can become exposed to bacteria and carbohydrates due to loss of gum tissue with age.

## HOSPITALIZATIONS

As shown in Figure 66, from 2008 through 2012, 252 DeKalb County residents were hospitalized because of dental conditions.



Source: Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions, Online Analytical Statistical Information System, Office of Health Indicators for Planning, Georgia Department of Public Health, 2014.

## ORAL CANCER

Oral cancer refers to cancer of the mouth, lips, tongue, cheeks, floor of the mouth, hard and soft palates, sinuses or throat. The greatest risk factor for oral cancer is tobacco use, including smoking cigarettes and using smokeless (spit or chew) tobacco. People who both use tobacco and drink alcohol increase their risk even more. In DeKalb County from 2008 through 2012, oral cancer mortality (deaths) was higher among males compared to females.

## COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION

Fluoride is a chemical element that is naturally present in water. People who live in communities with higher levels of fluoride in the water tend to have fewer dental cavities compared to people who live in areas with lower fluoride levels. DeKalb County began fluoridating its public water system in 1954. Recently, the fluoride levels in DeKalb County were lowered to 0.7 parts per million following recent recommendations set by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services.

As of December 2012:

- 75 percent of Americans who use public water systems were benefiting from fluoridation.
- 96 percent of Georgians who use public water systems were benefiting from fluoridation.
- 100 percent of DeKalb County residents who use the county water system were benefiting from fluoridation.

### *What can you do to prevent oral health problems?*

- Avoid smoking and using smokeless (spit or chew) tobacco.
- Limit consumption of alcohol and sugary foods and drinks.
- Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss teeth daily.
- Replace toothbrush every three or four months.
- Visit dentist regularly for cleanings and exams.
- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, eating utensils, cups and glasses.
- Brush babies' gums with a soft cloth and water.
- Take children for their first dental visit after the first tooth appears.





