

# Gum disease found to be significant public health concern

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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 35. 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 US adults. The pilot study finds that the original partial-mouth study methodology may have underestimated true disease prevalence by up to 50 percent.

Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the gum tissue and other structures supporting the teeth. If left untreated, it can lead to tooth loss, and may also interfere with other systems of the body. 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 American Academy of Periodontology. "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."

Dr. Low explained that the increased prevalence of periodontal disease makes it essential to maintain healthy teeth and gums. "Not only should you 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. A dental professional, such as a periodontist, a specialist in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of gum disease, will conduct the comprehensive exam to assess your periodontal disease status.

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 US 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." Dr. 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."

Provided by American Academy of Periodontology

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