

## Dentists could screen 20 million Americans for chronic physical illnesses: study

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Nearly 20 million Americans annually visit a dentist but not a general healthcare provider, according to an NYU study published today in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The study, conducted by a nursing-dental research team at NYU, is the first of its kind to determine the proportion of Americans who are seen annually by a dentist but not by a general healthcare provider.

This finding suggests dentists can play a crucial role as [health](#) care practitioners in the front-line defense of identifying systemic disease which would otherwise go undetected in a significant portion of the population, say the researchers.

"For these and other individuals, dental professionals are in a key position to assess and detect oral signs and symptoms of systemic health disorders that may otherwise go unnoticed, and to refer patients for follow-up care," said Dr. Shiela Strauss, an associate professor of nursing at the NYU College of Nursing and co-director of the statistics and data management core for NYU's Colleges of Nursing and Dentistry.

During the course of a routine dental examination, dentists and dental hygienists, as trained healthcare providers, can take a patient's health history, check blood pressure, and use direct clinical observation and X-rays to detect risk for systemic conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.

The NYU research team examined the most recent available data, which came from a nationally representative subsample of 31,262 adults and children who participated in the Department of Health & Human Services 2008 annual National Health Interview Survey, a health status study of the U.S. population, which at that time consisted of 304,375,942 individuals. Physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants were among those categorized as general [health care](#) providers for the purposes of the survey.

When extrapolated to the U.S. population, 26 percent of children did not see a general health care provider. Yet over one-third of this group, representing nearly seven million children, did visit a dentist at least once during that year, according to survey results.

Among the adults, one quarter did not visit a general healthcare provider, yet almost a quarter -- nearly 13 million Americans -- did have at least one dental visit. When combined, adults and children who had contact only with dentists represent nearly 20 million people.

Ninety-three percent of the children and 85 percent of the adults had some form of health insurance, suggesting that while many of those who did not interact with a general healthcare provider may have had access to [general health](#) care, they opted not to seek it.

Provided by New York University

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