

Better food choices near schools for healthier teeth

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Larkmead School. Credit: CC-BY-SA-2.5,2.0,1.0

There's something endearing about the crooked, gapped-tooth smiles of children whose permanent teeth are coming in. While it's normal for adult teeth to show up at very different times, should we expect the same good oral health conditions for all children at all times?

In Québec there has been no impact study on [oral health](#) promotion since provincial guidelines were published in 2005. A team of Montréal researchers, including Dr. Tracie Barnett of INRS, took a look at schools in Greater Montréal to see how oral [health](#) was being promoted and what incidence this had on cavity rates in [children](#). Published in the *American*

Journal of Preventive Medicine, this study concluded that prevention programs are important, but that school food environments play a leading role in the appearance of cavities in kids ages 8 to 10.

Food choices in and around schools vary greatly and affect the general health of children. It's an environment often carefully observed to understand its impact on obesity prevalence, but rarely in relation to cavities. The data gathered for the QUALITY study (family study on the prevention of cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes in kids and teens) was ideal for verifying children's dental health.

Over a period of two years, the research team analyzed various factors affecting 330 students at 200 schools, including socioeconomic factors, school food environments, and cavity prevention programs. According to their findings, programs promoting healthy eating and good dental hygiene had a positive but relatively modest impact compared to children's food and socioeconomic environments.

Because cavities remain a public health concern, the researchers suggest making this component part of health promotion programs alongside obesity. Policies promoting healthy eating environments could have a greater impact on children's oral health than [school](#) programs run in isolation to encourage kids to take good care of their teeth.

More information: Anu Edasseri et al, Oral Health–Promoting School Environments and Dental Caries in Québec Children, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2017.07.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.07.005)

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