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American Dental Association Statement on Regular Brushing and Flossing to Help Prevent Oral Infections

CHICAGO, Aug. 22, 2013 – The ADA wants to remind consumers that brushing twice daily and flossing once a day are two critical behaviors to help prevent the risk of all oral infections. However, while a new study published in the *Journal of Cancer Prevention Research* titled “Examining the Association between Oral Health and Oral HPV Infection” suggests that even though there are potential benefits of good oral hygiene, it does not demonstrate that good oral hygiene can prevent infection with HPV viruses associated with oropharyngeal cancer.

Published online Aug. 21, researchers from the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston examined the role of oral health in oral HPV infection, either independently or in conjunction with other risk factors, such as smoking and oral sex practices. Oral HPV and oral health data from more than 3,400 individuals ages 30 to 69 years old, collected through the nationally representative 2009–2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), showed that higher unadjusted prevalence of oral HPV infection was associated with four measures of oral health: self-rated oral health as poor-to-fair; indication of potential gum disease; reported use of mouthwash to treat dental problems in the past week; and higher number of teeth lost.

The study concluded that poor oral health was an independent risk factor of oral HPV infection, irrespective of smoking and oral sex practices. Therefore, the researchers suggest improving oral hygiene and oral health may help to prevent HPV-related oral cancers.

However, people with poor oral hygiene habits may have poor general health habits that contribute to HPV infection. Also, HPV-associated cancers are not typically found in the mouth. They are located primarily at the base of the tongue and on the tonsils. Although the findings are interesting, much more research needs to be done to determine if oral hygiene habits have any effect on HPV infection. The best way to prevent mouth and throat cancers is to avoid tobacco and limit alcohol use.

For more information on the ADA's recommendations for healthy teeth and gums at every life stage, please visit mouthhealthy.org. The ADA Division of Science has also examined this study as part of [Science in the News](#), available at ada.org.

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About the American Dental Association

The not-for-profit ADA is the nation's largest dental association, representing 157,000 dentist members. The premier source of oral health information, the ADA has advocated for the public's health and promoted the art and science of dentistry since 1859. The ADA's state-of-the-art research facilities develop and test dental products and materials that have advanced the practice of dentistry and made the patient experience more positive. The ADA Seal of Acceptance long has been a valuable and respected guide to consumer dental care products. The monthly *The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)* is the ADA's flagship publication and the best-read scientific journal in dentistry. For more information about the ADA, visit www.ada.org. For more information on oral health, including prevention, care and treatment of dental disease, visit the ADA's consumer website www.MouthHealthy.org.