

Florida HEALTH

2025

Oral Health Status of Florida's Ninth Grade Students



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Introduction

Oral health plays a vital role in the physical, mental, social, and economic well-being of individuals and populations.¹ Oral health is the health of one's mouth, teeth, and gums. Oral health is a key indicator of overall health affecting one's ability to smile, speak, chew, swallow, taste, convey emotions, breathe, and socialize without pain or discomfort.

According to Healthy People 2030, tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in students and adults in the U.S.² Throughout this report tooth decay may also be referenced as dental caries, caries, or cavities. Cavities often go untreated and can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing, and learning, and in rare cases can lead to a severe infection. Untreated oral health problems are also linked to other diseases.

There are many reasons students do not have optimal oral health such as difficulties getting appointments, lack of insurance coverage, or not being able to afford it. Limited cross-sectional studies have found that parents of students who have a history of dental pain are more likely to report having missed work or school because of their child's dental problems.³

Healthy People 2030 goals include reducing the burden of oral diseases, and increasing access, education, integration into primary care, and surveillance.² Oral health data from ongoing surveillance is needed to assist in establishing the burden of oral health disease and improving statewide programmatic planning efforts. To address the need for state level oral health surveillance data, the Florida Department of Health's Public Health Dental Program (PHDP) established a surveillance system for monitoring oral health status, risk factors, and access to dental services among various populations.

The PHDP completed two surveillance projects with third grade students (2013-14 and 2016-17), completed surveys with Early Head Start and Head Start students (2014-15), and older adults in congregate meal sites (2015-16). The PHDP launched its first surveillance project for ninth grade students during the 2022-23 school year. As the inaugural survey for this age group, it aims to shed light on the oral health status of Florida's ninth graders. The following sections of this report detail project specifics including the methodology, results, limitations, and recommendations.

Executive Summary

During the 2022-23 school year, the PHDP initiated its first statewide oral health surveillance project of Florida's ninth grade students. The initiative, titled "Florida 2022-2023 Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Project," was conducted in 55 public high schools across 26 Florida counties. This marked a new milestone in oral health monitoring for this age group. The initiative had an overall participation rate of 28.4%. Dental screenings were provided by 11 registered dental hygienists contracted through the Florida Dental Hygienists Association, following the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors' Basic Screening Survey (BSS) protocols.

Key Findings

Of the Florida ninth graders surveyed:

- 20.7% had untreated decay, 29.2% had at least one dental sealant and 37.2% had caries experience (treated or untreated decay).
- Over half (53.8%) of the students affected by caries came from schools where more than 75% of students were enrolled in free/reduced lunch programs.
- 18.6% had early dental treatment needs (needs to see a dentist within the next several weeks because of untreated decay or broken restorations)
- 2.7% had urgent dental treatment needs (needs dental care within 24 to 48 hours because of signs and symptoms that include pain, infection, or swelling).
- 31.6% indicated they drank soda and/or juice one to two times per day in the past seven days, while 34.4% said they drank soda three to five times per day.
- 5.8% indicated that they have missed one to two school days for dental health related problems (toothaches, swollen gums, tooth injury etc.) in past 12 months.

Methodology – Basic Screening Survey

The Florida 2022-2023 Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Project used the BSS tool recommended by the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors to provide state and local health jurisdictions with a consistent model to monitor oral disease in a timely manner, at the lowest possible cost, with minimum burden on survey participants, and permit comparisons within and between states.⁹

The BSS reports the following measures:

1. **Untreated Decay:** Screener can readily observe breakdown of the enamel surface.
2. **Treated Decay:** Screener can observe previous treatment of decay such as amalgam and/or composite restorations, temporary restorations, crowns, or teeth missing due to decay.
3. **Caries Experience:** Screener can observe the prevalence of untreated or treated decay.
4. **Dental Sealants on permanent and/or primary molars:** Screener can observe the presence of partially and fully retained dental sealants.
5. **Urgency of Need for Dental Care:** Early dental care (needs to see a dentist within the next several weeks because of untreated decay or broken restorations); or urgent care (needs dental care within 24 to 48 hours because of signs and symptoms that include pain, infection, or swelling).

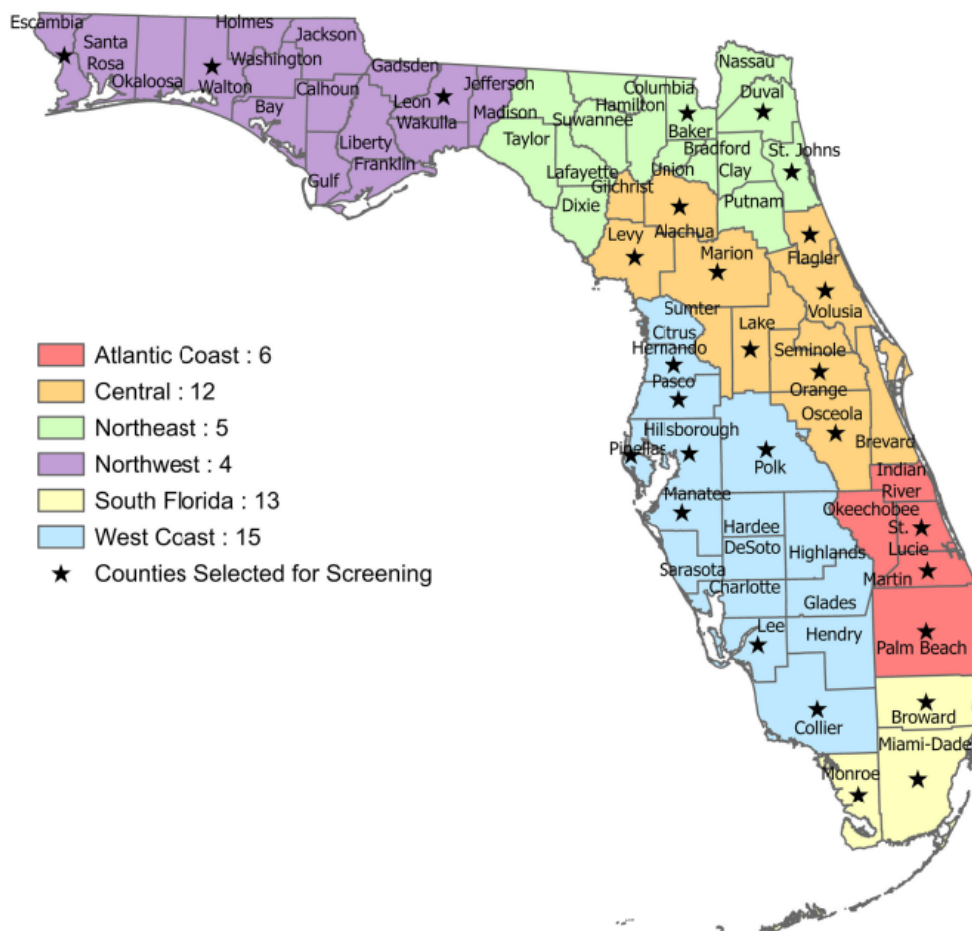
Sampling Procedure

Dr. Michael Manz, a data analyst for the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, used a Stratified Probability Proportional to Size sampling method based on Florida's 2022-23 school enrollment data to select a representative sample of ninth grade students from public high schools. Schools were sorted by region and free/reduced lunch (FRL) percentage to ensure geographic and socio-economic stratification.

With a systematic sampling approach, 55 schools were selected, and principals were contacted for participation. After obtaining consent, forms were sent to parents/guardians, and dental

hygienists collected returned forms to confirm participation. Schools that declined were replaced using random selection within the same sampling interval.

Figure 1. Florida 2022-23 Ninth Grade Oral Health Surveillance Region Map



The regional designations used for the Florida 2022-2023 Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Project and the counties selected to participate are shown in Figure 1.

Screening Methods

After obtaining permission from selected schools, the Florida Dental Hygienists' Association screeners distributed information about the project and consent forms. These forms, along with data collection sheets and screening result letters, were developed following BSS guidelines. Parents were encouraged to complete and return the consent form regardless of their decision to participate. Only students whose parents or guardians provided positive consent were screened.

The dental hygienists, trained in BSS guidelines, conducted screenings using CDC-recommended safety protocols. A team of 11 hygienists gathered information on caries experience, dental sealants, and treatment urgency, ensuring the screenings complemented, but did not replace, regular dental checkups.

The survey followed a cross-sectional and descriptive approach, aimed at estimating oral health status across a defined population at a single point in time. Data collected on screening day via paper records was entered into Florida's Linked Oral Status System (FLOSS) database, verified, and analyzed. To maintain accuracy, PHDP staff validated 100% of the screening data by cross-checking the paper records with the electronic database, ensuring consistency and reliability in the results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this surveillance project was completed using R Software, a high-level and efficient data analysis tool. Outcomes were weighted and adjusted to account for sample selection and participation rate based upon the Stratified Probability Proportional to the size sample design. This design ensures the results presented represent the entire ninth grade population, with a 95% confidence interval of certainty. R software was utilized to clean the data after validating entries, specifically removing records if students were absent or refused oral screening on the designated day. Demographic indicators of the participating students were obtained from the survey questions on the parental consent form and used to analyze the distribution of these indicators among the ninth-grade population. Eligibility for FRL was obtained from the Department of Education school list.

Results

This oral health surveillance project had an overall participation rate of 28.4% and a positive consent rate of 69.1%. Out of a total of 6,274 students enrolled in ninth grade across the 55 participating schools, 1,780 (28.4%) completed and returned their consent forms. Among these returned consent forms, 1,230 (69.1%) students had positive parental consent. Ultimately 1,115 (62.6%) students were present to participate and complete oral screening on the scheduled school visits.

Demographic Characteristics of Participating Students

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Students Participating in Florida's 2022-2023 Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Project

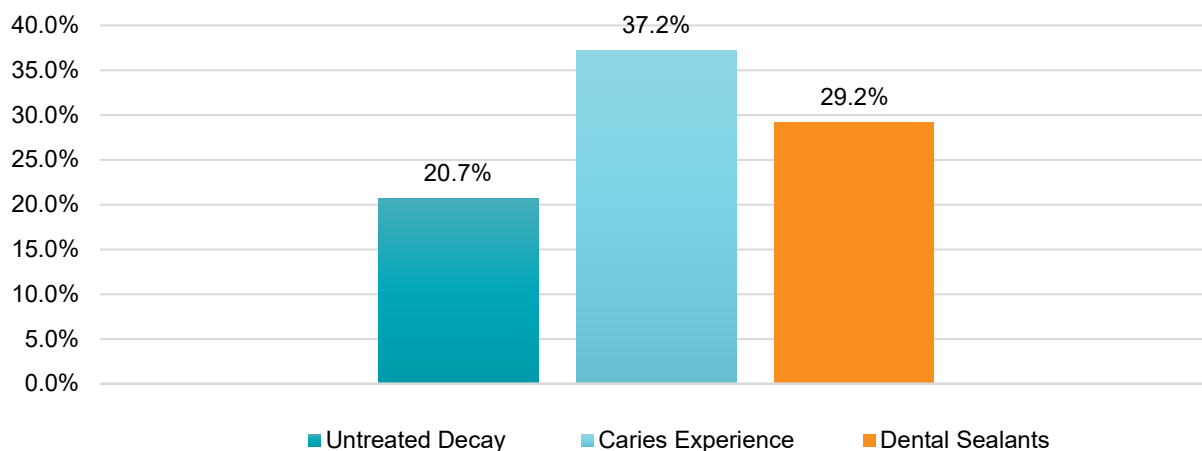
Characteristic	Number (%)
Total Participants	1,115
Age (Years)	
10-11	1 (0.1%)
12-13	14 (1.3%)
14-15	980 (88%)
16-17	104 (9.3%)
18-19	12 (1.1%)
20+	3 (0.2%)
Sex	
Male	536 (48.1%)
Female	560 (50.2%)
unknown	19 (1.7%)

The breakdown of demographic characteristics of the participating students is shown in Table 1. Note that these percentages are not weighted. Most of the participating students were 14-15 years old (88%) and female (50.2%).

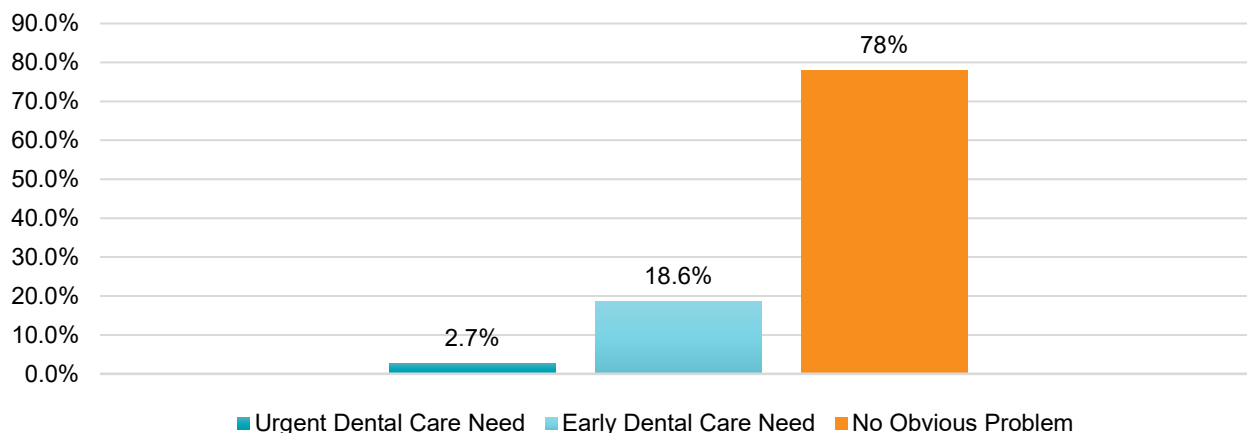
Oral Health Indicators

The screening data was weighted to achieve regional and state-level estimates of the various indicators. The data shown in the rest of the report represents the entire ninth grade population attending public schools in Florida.

**Figure 2. Health Status of Florida's Ninth Grade Students 2022-2023
Untreated Decay, Caries Experience, and Dental Sealants**

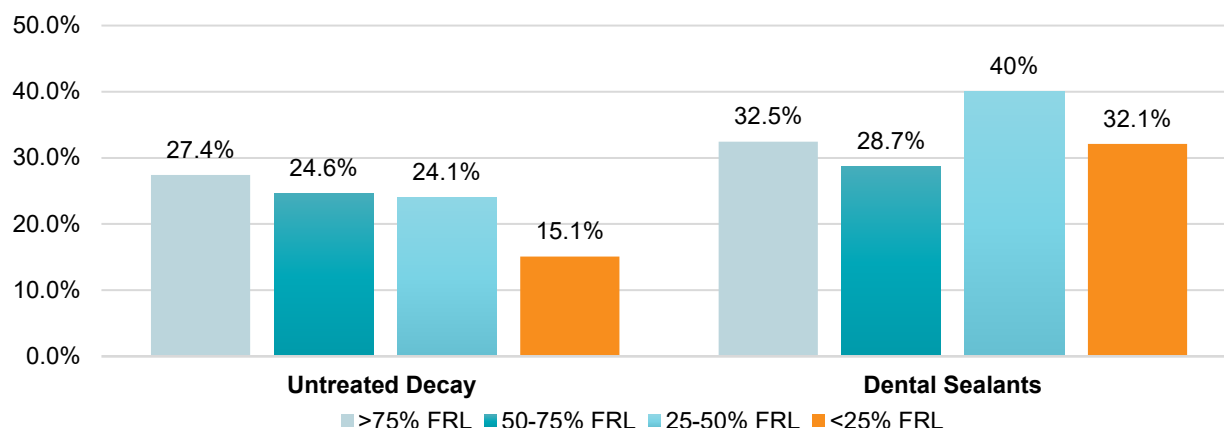


**Figure 3. Health Status of Florida's Ninth Grade Students 2022-2023
Urgent Dental Care Need, Early Dental Care Need, and No Obvious Problem**



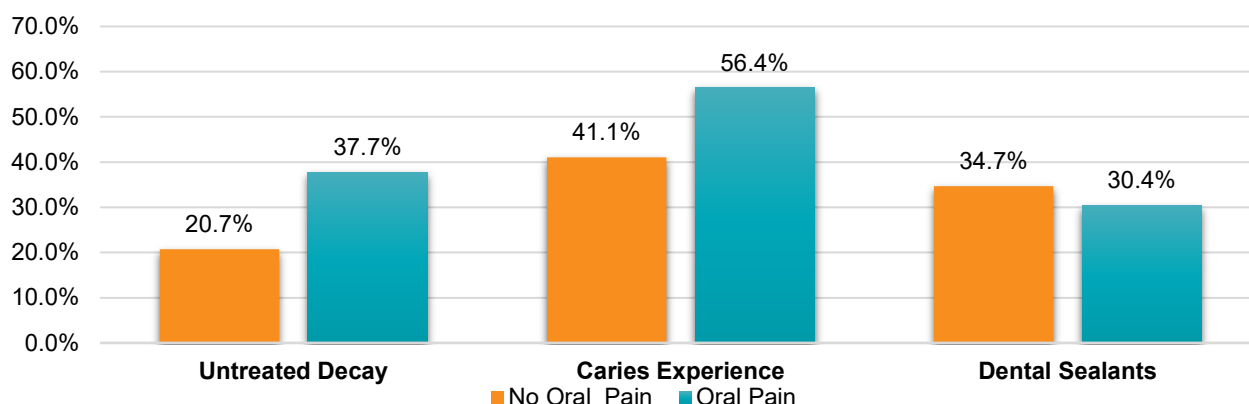
Overall results showed a total of 20.7% of ninth graders had untreated decay, 37.2% had caries experience, 29.2% had at least one dental sealant, 18.6% had early dental care needs, and 2.7% had urgent dental care needs (Figure 2 and Figure 3). These oral health indicators did not vary by gender in Florida.

Figure 4. Percentage of Untreated Decay and Dental Sealants among Florida's Ninth Grade Students 2022-2023, by School Free and/or Reduced Lunch Status



The FRL percentage at the selected schools was used as a proxy for individual student income and poverty status. These variables are highly correlated with poor oral health outcomes.

Figure 5. Percentage of Untreated Decay, Caries Experience, and Dental Sealants among Florida's Ninth Grade Students 2022-2023, by Oral Pain



Untreated decay can lead to oral pain. (Figure 5). Students who had untreated decay often experienced oral pain when biting or chewing, with 37.7% reporting such discomfort. Among students with caries experience, which includes untreated, and treated decay, 56.4% indicated they had oral pain. Additionally, 34.7% of students with dental sealants reported no oral pain.

Other Indicators from Parents Form

The following questions were asked on the parents form and consent form for the Florida Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Project (Appendix A). While supplemental to the BSS, these questions provide additional information about the current oral health status and oral health history of the ninth-grade population. These graphs include all submitted consent forms, even if a student was not screened, and the data is weighted. The percentages will not be 100% due to either multiple answers possible or some respondents not answering the question.

Chronic Conditions and/or Developmental Delays

Question: Does your child have a history of any chronic conditions and/or developmental delays?

Table 2. Chronic Conditions and/or Developmental Delays among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

Condition	Percent (95% C.I.)
Asthma	9.4% (7.7, 11.1)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	8.2% (6.6, 9.8)
Cancer	0.0% (0.0, 0.0)
Diabetes	0.6% (0.2, 1.1)
Obesity	2.0% (0.2, 2.8)
Special Health Care Needs	1.2% (0.5, 1.8)
Other Condition	0.1% (0.0, 0.3)
No Condition	75.8% (73.3, 78.3)
Don't Know/Don't Remember	1.8% (1.0, 2.6)

As highlighted in Table 6, most students screened (75.8%) had no chronic conditions or developmental delays, while 9.4% had asthma and 8.2% were identified with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Child Seen by a Dentist This Past Year for Dental Care

Question: During the past 12 months, did your child see a dentist for any kind of dental care, including check-ups, dental cleanings, x-rays, filling cavities, getting a tooth pulled or other treatment?

Figure 6. Child Seen by a Dentist This Past Year for Dental Care among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

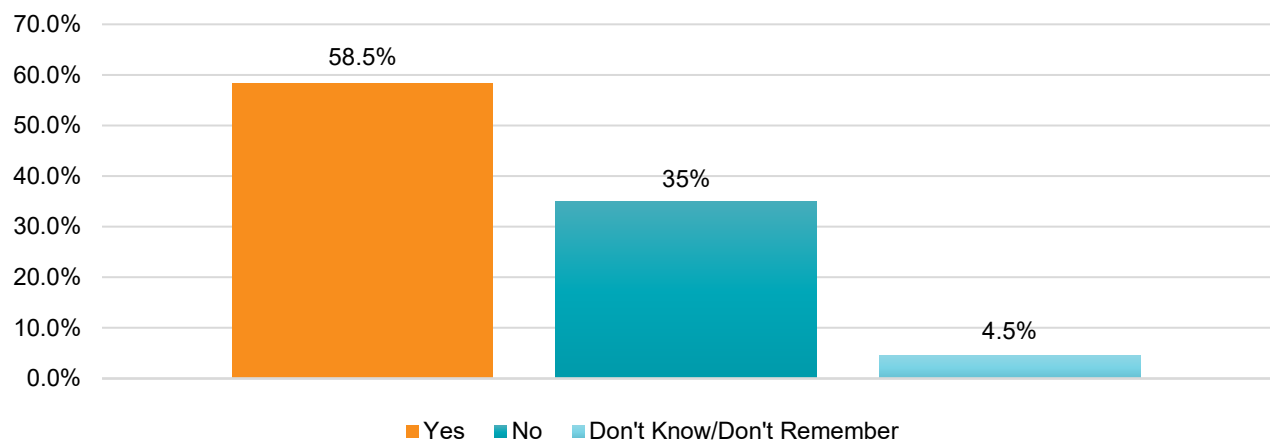


Figure 6 shows that a significant majority of respondents (58.5%) answered that their child was seen by a dentist when they needed dental care while only (35%) responded that there was no time when their child was seen by a dentist during past year.

Child Needed Dental Care

Question: During the past 12 months, was there any time when your child NEEDED dental care (including check-ups) but didn't get it because you couldn't afford it?

Figure 7. Time when your Child needed Dental Care among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

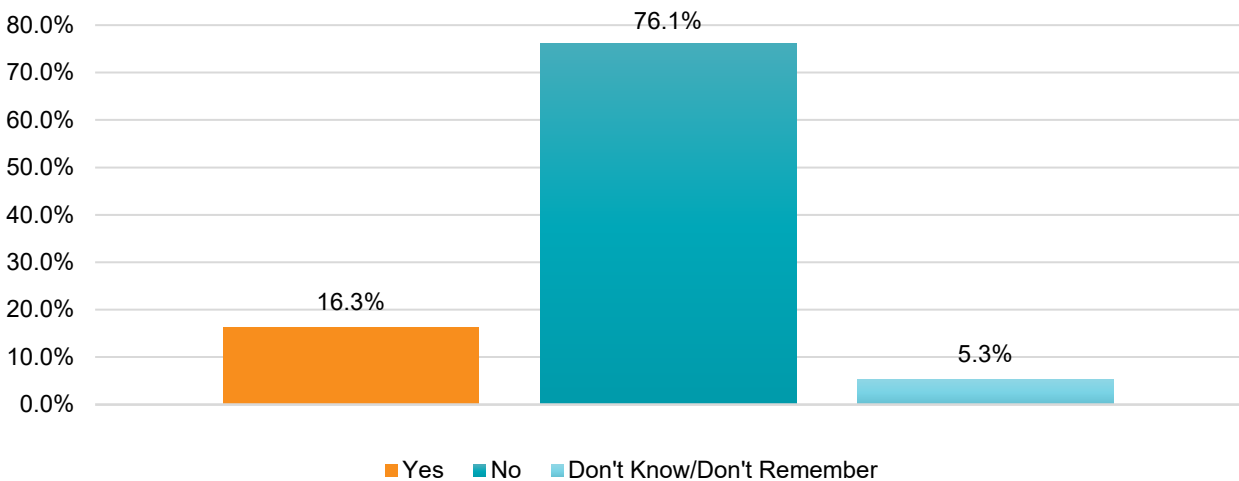


Figure 7 shows that a significant majority of respondents (76.1%) answered there was no time when their child needed dental care while only (16.3%) responded that there was a time when their child needed dental care during past year.

Reported Oral Pain

Question: During the past 12 months, did your child have any oral pain?

Figure 8. Percentage of Oral Pain among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

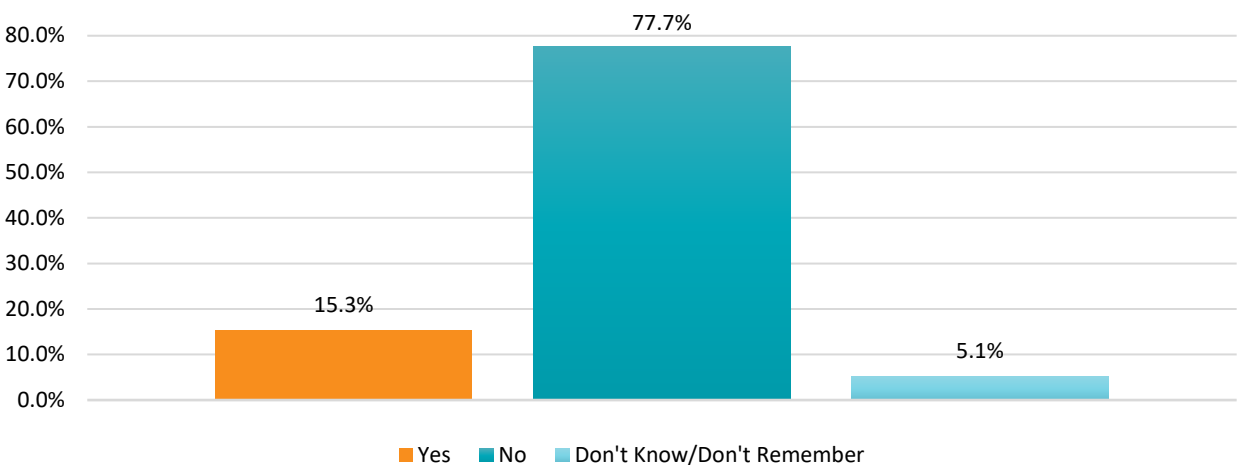


Figure 8 shows that (77.7%) of students did not report oral pain in the past year, while (15.3%) reported oral pain.

Frequency of Drinking Regular Soda, Pop, Juice

Question: During the past 7 days, how many times did your child drink soda or pop, juice (including 100% fruit juice, Kool-Aid, and lemonade), sweet tea, coffee, sweetened milk or milk substitutes, or sports or energy drinks (such as Gatorade and Red Bull)?

Figure 9. Frequency of Regular Soda or Pop, Juice Consumption Among Florida's Ninth Grade Students in the Past 7 Days, 2022-2023

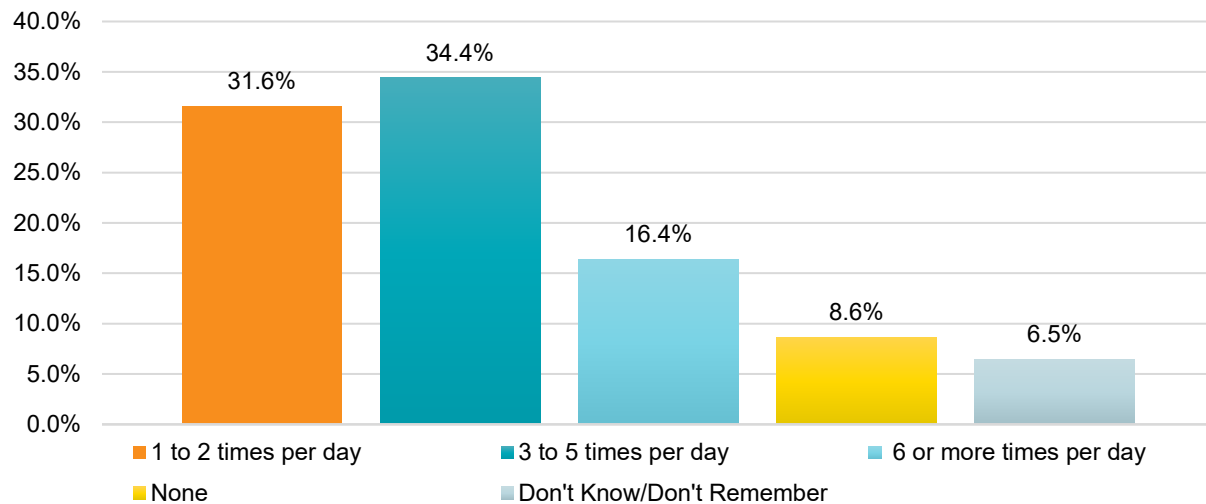


Figure 9 shows (8.6%) had no regular soda, pop, or juice in the past 7 days, while (34.4%) consumed it 3-5 times and (31.6%) consumed it 1-2 times during the past week.

Correlation Between Drinking Regular Soda, Pop, or Juice Consumption, Oral Pain and Caries Experience

Figure 10. Correlation Between Soda, Pop, or Juice Consumption, Oral Pain and Caries Experience Among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

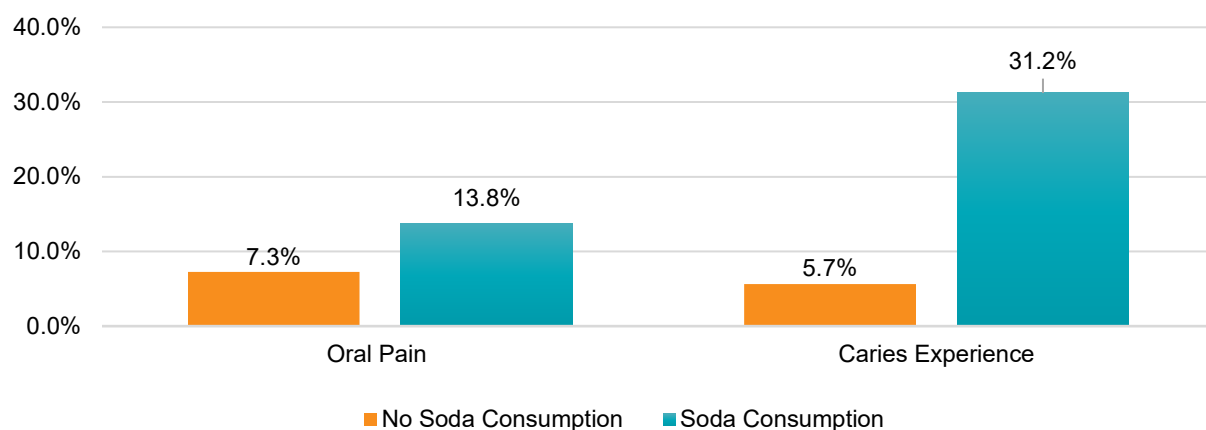


Figure 10 indicates that both oral pain (13.8%) and caries experience (31.2%) are significantly higher among individuals who consume soda, pop, or Juice one or more times a day, compared to those who do not (oral pain: 7.3%, caries experience: 5.7%).

Emergency Room Visit

Question: During the past 12 months, did your child visit the emergency department (or emergency room) because of any oral or dental related issues?

Figure 11. Emergency Room Visit because of Oral Issues among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

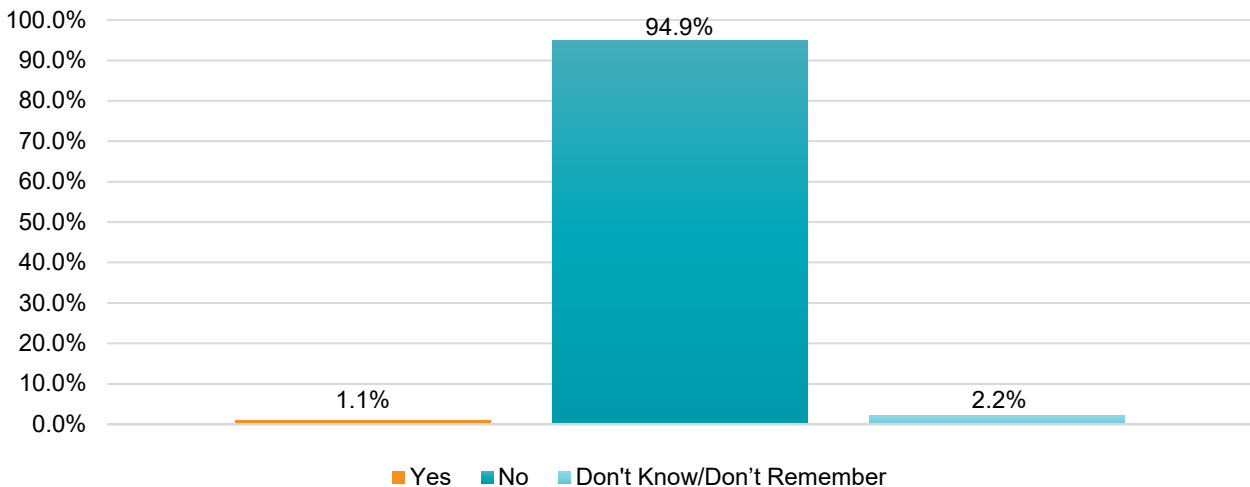


Figure 11 shows (94.9%) did not visit the emergency room due to oral issues in the past 12 months.

Days of School Missed

Question: During the past 12 months, how many days of school did your child miss for dental health related problems (toothaches, swollen gums, tooth injury etc.)? Do not include days missed for routine dental visit.

Table 3. Days of School Missed among Florida's Ninth Grade Students, 2022-2023

Days of School (N)	Percent (95% C.I.)
0 days	85% (82.9, 87.1)
1 to 2 days	5.83% (4.5, 7.2)
2 to 3 days	1.18% (0.5, 1.7)
5 days or more	1.18% (0.5, 1.7)
Don't Know/Don't Remember	4.84% (3.6, 6.1)

According to Table 7, a significant majority of respondents (85%) reported that they did not miss any school days due to oral health problems or dental visits.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the information presented from this survey. First, these screenings were conducted without the use of radiographs (X-rays), therefore, the findings may differ from those observed and diagnosed by clinicians outside of this project. Second, this survey was conducted only on public school students, of which not all participated, and may not be representative of all ninth-grade students in Florida. In addition to those who could not participate due to no consent or a negative consent, some students were absent on the day screenings were conducted which could not be screened on another day. Last, the screeners are encouraged to be conservative, thus, the results represented here may be an underrepresentation of the true oral health status of Florida's ninth grade students.

Recommendations

Florida strives to make continued progress to improve access to preventive dental care for students in Florida. Continued collaborative partnerships with school-based dental programs to share information on evidence-based prevention and early intervention practices facilitates the promotion of oral disease prevention efforts including dental sealants.

Additional opportunities to improve the oral health status of Florida's ninth grade students include:

- Evaluate and address the promotion of dental sealant services for school-age children.
- Increase the dental workforce providing school-based dental services, including cost effective dental sealants.
- Encourage teacher and parent involvement in developing an appropriate oral health literacy campaign for school age children.
- Increase the dissemination of proper oral care information and resources to children and parents.
- Continue oral health surveillance activities for school-age children and track progress in the reduction of oral health diseases.

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4. Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD). (2017). Basic Screening Surveys: An Approach to Monitoring Community Oral Health: Preschool and School Children. www.astdd.org

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter and Form for Parents

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General

January 2, 2023

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child's high school has been chosen to take part in the *2022-2023 Our Smiles Count Project*. The project is with the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) and the Florida Dental Hygienists' Association (FDHA). This project gathers information on the dental health needs of ninth grade children in Florida. A healthy mouth is part of total health and makes a child more prepared to learn.

If you choose to let your child participate, they will receive a dental kit that includes a toothbrush, toothpaste, and floss. A licensed dental hygienist will complete a one to two minute "smile check" (screening) using only a mouth mirror. They will wear gloves and use a new and clean mirror for each child. Results of your child's "smile check" will be kept private. Your child will not be named in any report.

A letter will be sent home with your child's screening results and will include a link to search for dentists in your area. If you need help getting dental care or insurance, please contact the school nurse or school counsellor. This screening does **not** take the place of regular dental check-ups. Even if you have a family dentist, we still want you to participate in *Our Smiles Count Project*.

Please complete and sign the consent form on the back. This will allow your child to be in *Our Smiles Count*. Return the form to your child's teacher tomorrow.

Thank you for working with us to learn how we may improve the dental health of Florida's children. If you have any questions about *Our Smiles Count Project*, please contact Tami Miller, Project Manager, FDHA at (860) 367-4813 or email tami@fdha.org, or FDOH at (850) 245-4333 or email dental@flhealth.gov.

Sincerely,

Catherine Bridges, DMD
State Executive Dental Director
Public Health Dental Program
Florida Department of Health

Consent form on the back



Florida Department of Health
Community Health Promotion
4052 Bald Cypress Way Bin A-14 • Tallahassee, FL 32399-1721
PHONE: 850/ 245-4333 • FAX: 850/ 414-7552
www.flhealth.gov/dental

 **Accredited Health Department**
Public Health Accreditation Board

Child's Name: _____	Child's Age: _____
Child's Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	
Race/Ethnicity:	
<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
Type of insurance that pays for some or all of your child's dental care:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Private Insurance <input type="checkbox"/> Medicaid <input type="checkbox"/> Florida Healthy Kids <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> None	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I give permission for my child's mouth to be screened.	
<input type="checkbox"/> No, I do not give permission for my child's mouth to be screened.	
Signature of Parent or Guardian	Date
The purpose of this screening is to collect data. You will receive a screening results form for use by a "dentist at a prompt subsequent examination." Please note: "diagnosis of caries, soft tissue disease, oral cancer, temporomandibular joint disease (TMJ), and dentofacial malocclusions can only be completed by a dentist in the context of delivering a comprehensive dental examination," in accordance with Section 466.0235, Florida Statutes.	

Please answer the following 7 questions to help us learn more about your child's dental care. If you do not want to answer the questions, your child's mouth can still be screened.

1. Does your child have a history of any chronic conditions and/or developmental delays? **(Select all that apply)**
☐ Asthma ☐ ADD/ADHD (attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) ☐ Cancer
☐ Diabetes ☐ Obesity ☐ Special Health Care Needs ☐ None ☐ Don't know/don't remember
2. During the past 12 months, did your child see a dentist for any kind of dental care, including check-ups, dental cleanings, x-rays, filling cavities, getting a tooth pulled or other treatment? **(Check one)**
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know/don't remember
3. During the past 12 months, was there any time when your child NEEDED dental care (including check-ups) but didn't get it because you couldn't afford it? **(Check one)**
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know/don't remember
4. During the past 12 months, did your child have a toothache? **(Check one)**
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know/don't remember
5. During the past 12 months, did your child visit the emergency department (or emergency room) because of any oral or dental related issues? **(Select one)**
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know/don't remember
6. During the past 12 months, how many days of school did your child miss for oral health related problems (toothaches, bleeding gums, etc.)? Do not include days missed for routine dental visit. **(Check one)**
☐ 0 days ☐ 1 to 2 days ☐ 3 to 4 days ☐ 5 days or more ☐ Don't know/don't remember
7. During the past 7 days, how many times did your child drink soda or pop, juice (including 100% fruit juice, Kool-Aid, and lemonade), sweet tea, coffee, sweetened milk or milk substitutes, or sports or energy drinks (such as Gatorade and Red Bull)? **(Check one)**
☐ 1 to 2 times during the past 7 days ☐ 3 to 5 times during the past 7 days
☐ 6 or more times during the past 7 days ☐ None ☐ Don't know/don't remember

Appendix B: Ninth Grade Oral Health Screening Results Form

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.

**Ron DeSantis**

Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD

State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

Our Smiles Count Project Ninth Grade Screening Form SY 22-23

Screen Date: _/_/_/_/_/_	School Code:	Screener's Initials:	Age:	Child's FLOSS Record Number:
Untreated Decay: <input type="checkbox"/> 0=No untreated decay <input type="checkbox"/> 1=Yes untreated decay		Treated Decay: <input type="checkbox"/> 0=No treated decay <input type="checkbox"/> 1=Yes treated decay		
Sealants present on permanent first/second molar: <input type="checkbox"/> 0=No sealants <input type="checkbox"/> 1=Yes sealants (at least one)		Treatment Urgency: <input type="checkbox"/> 0=No obvious problem <input type="checkbox"/> 1=Early dental care <input type="checkbox"/> 2=Urgent dental care		
Comments (if needed, also include comments if an oral lesion is present): 				

Appendix C: Screening Results Letter Sent to Parents

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

Our Smiles Count Project Ninth Grade Screening Results

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Dear: _____

As part of the *Our Smiles Count Project*, your child's teeth and mouth were screened today. No x-rays were taken. The results of the screening show that:

- _____ Your child appears to have no obvious dental problems but should continue to have routine check-ups by their dentist.
- _____ Your child has one or more teeth which should be looked at by their dentist to check if treatment is needed.
- _____ Your child has one or more teeth which appear to need care now and you should contact their dentist as soon as possible for a complete exam.
- _____ Your child's mouth has an oral lesion (sore) in one or more areas, that appears to need care now and you should contact their dentist as soon as possible for a complete exam.

This screening does **not** replace an in-office dental check-up by your child's dentist. If your child does not have a dentist or you need help with getting dental care for your child, please contact the school nurse, school counselor, or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/dental/resources> to search a dentist in your area.

The data collected from the screenings will be sent to the Florida Department of Health. The data will only contain the collective results from the county where the screening occurred. No personal information or school names will be disclosed in the report.

**Florida Department of Health
Public Health Dental Program**
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