

Painful Teeth Can Impact the Classroom

Children's ability to learn can be compromised by dental disease

“Do your teeth hurt?” It’s not a question one expects to hear from teachers who are trying to troubleshoot poor academic performance, but perhaps it ought to be.

Each year more than 50 million school hours are forfeited by students whose dental-related illnesses cause them to stay home or seek professional care during school hours. In cases where pain is not intense enough to keep children out of school, it might nevertheless distract them in the classroom.



“Some children with poor oral health have a hard time in school because they can’t focus on their school work,” said Dr. Michel Couret, DDS, Vice President, Professional Relations, Northeast Delta Dental. “If they are distracted by pain, they are unable to participate.”

With a new school year in progress, we urge parents to help children maintain good oral health. Along with promoting the basics of dental hygiene such as brushing after every meal and daily flossing, he also suggests parents think about scheduling their next regular checkup for their children.

In between visits to the dentist, parents and caregivers should also monitor children’s oral health or changes in behavior that might signify pain or discomfort. Parents should regularly check children’s mouths for signs of concern. They should look to see whether gums are bleeding, swollen, or bright red. Persistent bad breath or gums that have receded from the teeth could also be signs of oral infection. Such signs warrant a discussion or appointment with the dentist.

Packing healthy lunches and limiting the use of sugary beverages can also prevent problems associated with childhood tooth decay. “Untreated dental diseases can cause chewing problems, which in turn could restrict a child’s ability to get all the necessary nutrients from food,” Dr. Couret said. “Left untreated, cavities, gum disease, or other oral infections might eventually impair speech development, distract students in class, and hinder social development,” he said.