

## Oral Piercings Pose Potential Health Risks

Like clothing and hairstyles, oral piercings give teens and adults a way to express themselves. While trendy, this fashion statement poses a number of potential oral and overall health care risks.

“Anyone considering an oral piercing should consult a dentist to discuss the possible side effects,” says Shannon Mills, DDS, Vice President, Professional Relations at Northeast Delta Dental, “or, if you already have an oral piercing, schedule routine dental exams with a dentist.”

Some potential complications of oral piercings include:

- **Swelling** – Piercing may cause swelling of the tongue. According to the American Dental Association, in extreme cases a severely swollen tongue can actually close off the airway and prevent breathing.
- **Prolonged bleeding** – A blood vessel punctured while piercing may cause severe bleeding.
- **Damage to salivary glands** – An improperly placed tongue piercing may damage the salivary glands under the tongue, which produce five percent of saliva entering the oral cavity.
- **Choking** – Jewelry may become loose in the mouth, creating a choking hazard.
- **Plaque build-up** – Plaque may build up on piercings, requiring more frequent cleanings.
- **Damage to teeth and gums** – Jewelry may come in contact with both the teeth and gums, causing chipped or cracked teeth or gum recession.



- **Allergic reaction** – Jewelry containing certain metals may cause an allergic reaction.
- **Nerve damage** – A piercing that strikes a nerve may cause nerve damage, leading to numbness or loss of sensation at the piercing site.
- **Infection** – The wound from the piercing, coupled with teeming bacteria in the mouth, may create an increased risk of infection.

“If you decide to get an oral piercing and complications arise, schedule an appointment with your dentist,” says Dr. Mills. “Dentists are trained to monitor and manage oral health problems and will work with a physician to manage more serious conditions.”

Also, make sure to follow any home-care instructions, including cleaning, provided by your dentist or piercing specialist. This may help prevent immediate, short-term or long-term complications. Your dentist can prescribe an antimicrobial rinse to help keep the pierced site and jewelry clean.

“Whether a piercing is through the cheek, lip, or tongue, proper oral hygiene measures are critical,” says Dr. Mills, “and may reduce the risks of some damaging side effects of oral piercing.”

**Northeast Delta Dental**

[www.nedelta.com](http://www.nedelta.com)