



ORAL HEALTH

QANUILIRPITAA? 2017

Nunavik Inuit Health Survey

This report presents the results of the Oral Health component of the *Qanuilirpitaa?* 2017 Health Survey conducted in Nunavik. It describes self-perceived oral health, as well as clinical indicators of oral health and disease status among Nunavimmiut aged 16 and over. In addition to the results obtained from questionnaire items, the component includes a clinical oral exam of 1 275 Nunavimmiut performed by trained dentist-examiners. This report represents the most complete picture of the oral health of Nunavimmiut ever reported.

The majority of Nunavimmiut see their oral health in a positive light. Seven out of 10 Nunavimmiut consider themselves to have good, very good or excellent oral health. Although this is favourable news, care should be taken in interpreting this result as it is possible the cultural meaning of a positive self-perception of oral health signifies not currently having pain rather than not having oral problems. Those who consider themselves to have fair or poor oral health are more often men, people over age 30, or people who do not brush their teeth every day. About 8 out of 10 Nunavimmiut

rarely or never have discomfort when eating, experience pain in their mouths, or avoid foods due to mouth problems.

Looking at oral health protective behaviours, when asked about toothbrushing, about 6 out of 10 Nunavimmiut report brushing every day, which is less than the rate among the general population of Québec.¹ About half of Nunavimmiut report having consulted a dental professional less than one year ago. Those who did not consult were more often men, over 30 or without teeth.

With a few exceptions, the clinical oral health results of this survey do not show major differences with the most recent results for the Canadian general population.¹ Among key differences is the very high prevalence of deep dental cavities that are untreated among Nunavimmiut. Deep cavities requiring treatment are observed in about 8 out of 10 people, with around 4 deeply decayed teeth per person. The presence of untreated deep cavities increases the risk of painful dental abscess. This survey indicates that nearly 4 out of 10 Nunavimmiut show consequences

1. The Enquête Québécoise sur la santé de la population 2008 and Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) 2007-2009 cannot be compared with *Qanuilirpitaa?* 2017 due to methodological differences. However, a parallel between the results of the two surveys is made only in order to give the reader a point of reference.

of untreated advanced cavities such as pain, gum trauma or dental abscess. In regard to experience of dental cavities, this survey also indicates differences between residents of the Ungava and Hudson coasts. Hudson coast residents show more deep decay and fewer teeth having received treatment in the form of fillings than Ungava coast residents.

This survey found that Nunavimmiut more frequently have soft debris on their teeth than the general population of Canada.¹ Debris gathers easily when the teeth are brushed less often. Debris on the teeth are linked to a gum problem called gingivitis and almost 9 out of 10 Nunavimmiut show this condition. Favourably, most people present mild (61%) to moderate (21%) gingivitis. Since untreated cavities are more frequent on the Hudson coast, Hudson coast residents are more often affected by severe debris and moderate gingivitis than Ungava coast residents.

Another marked difference between Nunavimmiut and the general population of Canada is the frequency of dental trauma (injury to the front teeth). Nearly half of Nunavimmiut age 16 or older have experienced dental trauma, compared to around a quarter of Canadian adults age 20 or older.¹ As with dental cavities and gingivitis, Hudson coast residents show dental trauma

more frequently, and have more teeth involved in trauma than Ungava coast residents.

In conclusion, the oral health status of Nunavimmiut has many positive aspects, such as positive self-perception of oral health, low self-reports of oral pain and discomfort, low accumulation of dental calculus and similar rates of edentulism to the Canadian general population but there are also some challenges to overcome. To adequately address challenges to oral health, integrated approaches are needed. People's positive view of their own oral health is a favourable finding, as are the many similarities in oral health status between Nunavimmiut and the general populations of Canada and Québec. However, the high prevalence of untreated dental cavities, consequences of untreated cavities, debris on teeth, gingivitis and dental trauma all merit attention, as do the lower proportions of daily toothbrushing and consultation of dental professionals among Nunavimmiut. Health education that engages people and aligns with Inuit cultural values and realities is important, as is culturally safe access to care and interventions that include oral health as an aspect of overall well-being.



Qanuillirpitaa? 2017 is a population healthy survey carried out in Nunavik from August to October 2017. A total of 1 326 Nunavimmiut aged 16 and over from all 14 villages participated to this survey.

Nakurmiik to all Nunavimmiut who contributed to this important health survey!

For more information: nrhss.ca/en/health-surveys