FACT SHEET: TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS
THE GREATEST ORAL HEALTH ISSUES FACING TEENS TODAY AND HOW ORAL HEALTH AMERICA CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Teen and Young Adult Tobacco Use

- 95% of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21.¹
- Many smokers move from experimental smoking to regular, daily use between the ages of 18 and 21; about 580 teens under the age of 18 become regular smokers each day, and 1-in-3 will eventually die as result.²
- E-cigarette use tripled and hookah doubled among teens in 2014.³
- E-cigarettes are not regulated by the FDA and there is inadequate data on its long-term effects.⁴
- Hookah is addictive and harmful to users’ health. In fact, smoking from a hookah exposes an individual to more carbon monoxide and smoke than cigarette smokers are exposed to.⁵

WHAT WE CAN DO: Reduce Risky Behaviors with Tobacco 21 Legislation

- To dramatically prevent or reduce tobacco use among teens, Tobacco 21 legislation seeks to raise the minimum tobacco age to 21.¹
- Cigarette sales to those under 21 account for only 2.12% of total sales. Because 95% of smokers start by the age of 21, these are the very sales that lead to 9 out of every 10 new smokers.⁶
- Find out what you can do to support Tobacco 21 legislation at oralhealthamerica.org/YA

Risks of Receiving and Maintaining Oral Piercings

- Oral piercings may introduce complications, such as the transmission of hepatitis viruses and bacteria at the time of the piercing or in the course of wound care.⁷
- Body piercing is becoming increasingly common, but only 26% of states have regulatory authority over tattooing establishments, and only six states exercise authority over body-piercing establishments.⁸

WHAT WE CAN DO: Assure Piercing Safety for Teens and Young Adults

- Provide safety and educational materials available for teens about oral piercings.
- Encourage those seeking a piercing to research oral piercing establishments and their safety practices.
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and Mouth/Throat Cancers

- Teens account for 50% of the 18.8 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnosed each year.³
- The prevalence of HPV is significant as it accounts for 50% of new STI cases each year and is the principal cause of cervical cancer.¹⁰
- HPV-caused mouth and throat cancers are expected to be more common than cervical cancer by the year 2020.¹¹

WHAT WE CAN DO: Implement Student-Centered, School-Based Health Centers

- School-based health clinics offer the opportunity to intervene in the spread of infectious diseases, such as HPV.¹²
- School-based health centers are an ideal location to reach teens, because they reduce obstacles of receiving primary care, such as access to transportation, cost of care, and the requirement of parents to miss work or of the student to miss school.¹³
- Interventions within school-based health centers have been shown to increase the uptake of the HPV vaccine and completion of the 3-dose series.¹⁴

Sports Related Mouth Injuries

- 9% of all high school athletes have sustained some form of oral or mouth injury. 75% of these types of injuries occurred while the athlete refrained from mouth guard protection.¹⁵
- Parents may often be unable to get their child a mouth guard because of cost—a custom-fit mouth guard can cost between $200 and $500.¹⁶
- 84% of adolescent athletes report that they do not wear a mouth guard because it is not required by sport officials.¹⁷

WHAT WE CAN DO: Increase Sports Safety with Mouth Guards

- Advocate for mouth guards to become a requirement for athletes participating in contact sports.
- Work to ensure that every teen athlete has a properly fitted mouth guard that is easily accessible and affordable to reduce the number of sports related oral injuries.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE AN IMPACT?

Support Oral Health America by raising awareness about the importance of safety when it comes to the oral health of teens and young adults.

Please join Oral Health America as we strive to impact the lives of America’s teens and young adults. Together, we can make a difference. To get involved, please visit oralhealthamerica.org/YA

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² Ibid.
10 Ibid.