

HEALTH BARRIERS TO LEARNING: DENTAL PAIN

Why is dental pain a Health Barrier to Learning?

Having good dental health can positively impact a student's learning. It can promote speech development, focus, and confidence during class time. Cavities and tooth infections are often painful and distracting for students and may cause students to be absent from school or distracted while in school. It can be especially dangerous if these dental conditions go untreated.

About 17% of school-aged children have untreated cavities. Students should visit the dentist twice a year to check for cavities and get their teeth cleaned. Encouraging positive dental health for students and their families can improve the overall health of students and contribute to a student's performance in the classroom.

How can I tell if a student is experiencing dental pain?

If a student has a new or small cavity, he or she may not experience any symptoms or pain. When small cavities go untreated, a student may:

- Say her or his tooth or face hurts
- Put her or his head down during class
- Experience pain when eating or drinking
- Be sensitive to extremely hot or cold food and drink
- Have visible holes in teeth
- Have brown, black or white stains on a tooth

What can I do in the classroom?

Talk to students about the importance of brushing their teeth with toothpaste twice a day, for two minutes each time. Students should also try to floss once a day.

If a student mentions they have tooth pain or you notice any of the signs above, **send a note or call a parent**. Parents may not recognize that their child has cavities or a possible tooth infection. Be aware that parents may be sensitive to such conversations or get defensive. Try to stay away from language that makes them feel judged by focusing on the student's pain or behavior in the classroom instead.

Selected Oral Health Indicators in the United States, 2005–2008. Bruce A. Dye, D.D.S., M.P.H.; Xianfen Li, M.S.; and Eugenio D. Beltrán-Aguilar, D.M.D., M.S., Dr.P.H.

Guarnizo-Herreño, C. C., & Wehby, G. L. (2012). Children's dental health, school performance, and psychosocial well-being. *The Journal of pediatrics*, 161(6), 1153-1159.