



Accessing Oral Health Care in Illinois

Oral health is more than just healthy teeth. Oral refers to the mouth, which includes the teeth, gums, and supporting tissues. **FDI World Dental Federation defines oral health as “multi-faceted and includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow, and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence and without pain, discomfort, and disease of the craniofacial complex.”** Oral health is an important part of overall health, well-being, and directly affects your quality of life.

Diseases and disorders that can affect oral health include:

- Tooth decay and periodontal or gum disease.
- Viral infections, including cold and canker sores.
- Birth defects, such as cleft lip and palate, and missing all or most teeth.
- Chronic oral-facial pain that can result from disorders of the jaw joints and chewing muscles, such as temporomandibular joint (TMJ) dysfunction or craniomandibular dysfunction.
- Oral and throat cancers.

Many health conditions are affected by your current oral health and well-being. Changes in the mouth often are the first symptoms of problems elsewhere in the body. Dentists and dental hygienists play an important role in evaluating, diagnosing, preventing, or treating oral diseases, which can affect systemic health. Poor oral health also may affect your health with diseases and health conditions, such as diabetes, immune disorders, heart disease, and having pre-term low birth weight babies. These health conditions may result in poor health outcomes when your oral health is not good.

If you are having problems finding oral health care, there are several ways to find access to care. Look at the resources listed below to help locate oral health care services in your community. But first, some things to consider when choosing a dental home.

- Is the office easy to get to from your home or job?
- Do they have convenient office hours for you?
- If you have dental benefits, is this dentist in your network?
- Doctor-patient communication is important. Will you need translation or interpreter services?

These resources are searchable by your home ZIP code.

- “Find a Dentist” for Illinois State Dental Society (ISDS) member dentist directory: <https://www.isds.org/for-the-public/find-a-dentist>
- “Find a Dental Clinic” resource on the ISDS website: <https://www.isds.org/for-the-public/find-a-dental-clinic>. This is a listing of clinics for people with limited financial ability.

- Illinois' Federally Qualified Health Centers: <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov>. These centers are for people who are low income, uninsured, or are undocumented residents.

Other ideas to consider when looking for a dental care are:

- Local health department dental clinics.
- Dental schools and dental hygiene programs.
- Check with your medical insurance plan to see if dental insurance is included and, if it is, contact customer service and ask for list of participating dentists.
- Consider purchasing a dental insurance plan.

Resources

American Dental Association

<https://www.ada.org/en/science-research/health-policy-institute/geographic-access-to-dental-care>

American Dental Hygiene Association

www.adha.org

Oral Health Illinois

www.oralhealthillinois.org

Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475>

Healthy Policy Institute

<https://hpi.georgetown.edu/oralhealth/>

FDI World Dental Federation

<https://www.fdiworlddental.org/oral-health/fdi-definition-of-oral-health>