

the mouth. Because many of the medications used to treat candidiasis contain high quantities of sugar, you might want to consider using a fluoride rinse. Check with your dentist on this.

- **Hairy Leukoplakia:** This condition is seen mostly in folks with HIV. It most often appears as vertical white lines on the sides of the tongue, or larger white patches which can't be removed by scraping. It may discolor when you drink coffee or smoke.

- **Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS):** Often the first sign of AIDS, KS can be found in the mouth as well as on the rest of the body. It appears as red or purple areas which may be raised or flat.

- **Periodontal Disease (Gum disease):** HIV is not the only cause of periodontal disease, but it may become troublesome in people with HIV. It causes sore, bleeding gums. Sometimes, the mouth and gums may become painful and you may have bad breath. If left untreated, periodontal disease may lead to tissue breakdown around the teeth and bone loss in the jaw.

- **Warts:** Oral warts can show up anywhere in the mouth and can be either flat with a distinct border or raised and irregular, like a small cauliflower.

- **Herpes Simplex:** Herpes is often more active in folks with HIV infection. They may appear as slit-like lesions on the tongue, cold sores on the lips and ulcers in the mouth.

- **Oral Ulcers:** These are like the canker sores one had as a child and appear as circular or irregular white bumps with a red border. They are usually painful and are

often aggravated by tartar-control toothpaste, mouthwash and certain foods, like pineapples or oranges.

If you feel you may have one of these conditions, see your dentist for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Remember, if you have a dentist, continue your care. If you don't have a dentist, get one. You may need to see a dentist who specializes in the treatment of these conditions. Inform your dentist of your HIV status. If you notice any changes in your mouth, see your dentist immediately. Continue to brush and floss regularly.

For more information, contact the American Dental Association or your local HIV/AIDS service agency.

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Dental Health Matters...

When You Have HIV

OK... So maybe going to the dentist isn't a moonlit stroll on the beach, a hot tub for two beneath the snowy skies of Vermont, extra-spicy Cajun hot links, or a perfect bowling game. Going to the dentist may not be on anyone's list of the Top Ten Ways to spend one's free time.

But, because of the effect HIV can have on your oral health, it is very important for folks with HIV to see a dentist regularly. Your oral health is important to your overall well-being. What might just be a broken tooth this year could be a painful, decayed tooth which needs to be pulled next year.

If you already visit a dentist at least every six months, please continue. If not, find one and see him or her right away. Early oral care will help you prevent and treat HIV-related infections that occur in the mouth.

Getting Regular Check-ups

As you may know, when you have HIV your body is open to many kinds of opportunistic infections. Many of the first symptoms of these infections are often found in the mouth. Regular check-ups at least every six months mean an early diagnosis. Early treatment will give you a better chance in controlling HIV. Regular treatments minimize pain and discomfort and help keep your mouth healthy.

Good nutrition is very important. If you experience pain in chewing or difficulty in swallowing, you will eat less and won't be able to get the nutrition that you need. See a dentist soon if your mouth feels sore or painful.

Finding a Dentist

If you don't already have a dentist, consider finding one right away. No dentist can legally refuse to treat you because you have HIV. Some are more comfortable with and knowledgeable about treating folks with HIV. To find a dentist, you can get a referral from your doctor, your local AIDS agency or a friend with HIV.

Telling Your Dentist

Telling your dentist about your HIV status early on will help him or her to recognize and treat HIV-related conditions in the mouth. Let your dentist know what medications you are taking so any treatment he or she prescribes won't interfere with your treatment or cause any bad side-effects. Early treatment greatly increases your chances of managing an HIV-related condition.

Confidentiality

Your privacy is protected by law. Your dentist is expected to protect your privacy unless you agree, in writing, to have your HIV status disclosed. He may discuss your medical condition with other health professionals involved in your care.

Ask your dentist how he or she guarantees your privacy in the dental office. You can ask questions like: Is your chart kept out of sight from other patients and unauthorized personnel? What notes about your HIV status will be added to your dental file? When your chart or file is copied for insurance purposes, what types of information will be sent?

It is important to find out how your HIV status is handled when your file is copied for insurance purposes. There are laws that prohibit disclosure of your health status to anyone other than the dental staff. These laws also prohibit the use of HIV test results by health care insurers. Many dentists will keep your HIV status separate from your main file by noting it on a piece of colored paper in your folder and instructing their staff not to copy it for anyone, including insurers.

HIV-Related Conditions

Here is a list of some of the most common HIV-related conditions found in the mouth. Some are easily treatable; others are more difficult. Because the names of these conditions all sound serious, don't get upset when you read about them. You might find yourself running to the mirror, sticking out your tongue and deciding you have a specific condition. While it's important to be informed about HIV-related oral conditions, only your dentist can really determine what's going on in your mouth.

- **Candidiasis:** This infection is caused by a fungus and is common in people with compromised immune systems. It may also be triggered by several other things, including the use of some antibiotics. The most common form is called thrush and appears as small white patches inside the mouth and on the tongue. They can cause a burning sensation in the mouth, over-sensitivity to spicy foods and a change in taste. These patches can be removed by scraping.

Other forms of candidiasis can appear as smooth red areas, often on top of the tongue, or sores in the corners of