

# Community Youth Focus

FMCH Community Coalition – Building a network of services for youth

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## Adolescents risk tooth loss from oral piercing



In recent years, piercing of the tongue, lips, or cheeks has become a popular form of self-expression in adolescents. As with pierced ears, jewelry used in oral piercing comes in many different styles including studs, barbells, and rings. However, oral piercing involves much greater health risks than ear piercing.

Adolescents should understand the risks associated with oral jewelry before deciding to obtain it. According to the American Dental Association ([www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)), some of the potential consequences of oral piercing include:

- **Infection** – Our mouths contain millions of bacteria, which can lead to infection following oral piercing.
- **Prolonged bleeding** – If a blood vessel is punctured by the needle during piercing, it could result in serious, uncontrolled blood loss.
- **Pain and swelling** – Pain and swelling are common symptoms of oral piercing. Occasionally, in extreme cases, a severely swollen tongue can close off the airway and restrict breathing. The tongue, unlike an earlobe, is in constant motion, which can slow and complicate the healing process.
- **Chipped or cracked teeth** – Contact with oral jewelry can fracture teeth, and teeth that have restorations can be damaged if jewelry hits them.
- **Injury to the gums** – Not only can mouth jewelry injure gum tissue, it can cause the gums to recede, leading to bone loss. Tongue piercing may damage the gum tissue behind the lower front teeth, and lip piercing may damage the gum tissue in front of the lower teeth. Loss of these soft tissues will also make the teeth more vulnerable to root decay.
- **Interference with normal oral function** – Mouth jewelry can cause excessive salivary flow, cause problems with chewing and swallowing, and impede the ability to pronounce words properly.

- **Blood-borne diseases** – Oral piercing has been identified as a possible factor in transmitting hepatitis B, C, D, and G.
- **Endocarditis** – Oral piercing carries a risk of an inflammation of the heart valves or tissues. The wound created during oral piercing provides an opportunity for oral bacteria to enter the bloodstream, where they can travel to the heart.

Because of the risks involved even after an initial oral piercing wound has healed, the American Dental Association recommends that both teens and adults avoid oral piercing.

For information about dental care for teens in Contra Costa, contact Lynn Pilant at (925) 313-6280. ✕

## Did You Know?

- ❖ The California Oral Health Needs Assessment, conducted in 1993-94, is the most recent data available on oral health needs in the state. The following data are from 898 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in 40 different California public and private schools:
  - 21% of students were in urgent need of dental care for extensive decay, pain or infection.
  - 16% had moderate to severe orthodontic needs.
  - 78% had experienced tooth decay, with an average of four teeth affected.
  - 45% of all students had untreated decay. However, 65-66% of both African-American and Latino/Hispanic students had untreated decay.
  - 61% had periodontal (gum) disease requiring professional treatment.
  - 44% had no dental insurance coverage and only 10% were covered by Medi-Cal.
  - Only 13% had received protective sealants on permanent molar teeth.
  - In non-fluoridated urban areas (comprising 84% of the state's population), 90% of Hispanic students and 69% of white students had experienced tooth decay.

Source: The Oral Health of California's Children: A Neglected Epidemic. Selected Findings and Recommendations from the California Oral Health Needs Assessment of Children, 1993-1994. The Dental Health Foundation, 1997.

## Coalition working to create safe schools for LGBTQ youth

The 2001 National School Climate Survey, conducted by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN), documented the school experiences of 904 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) high school students around the nation.<sup>1</sup> This survey found that verbal, sexual, and physical harassment were common experiences for LGBT students, and that for LGBT youth of color and female students, this abuse was elevated by racism and sexism. In addition, 68.6% of LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation.

In response to this reality for LGBTQ(Questioning) youth, The California Endowment has awarded the Horizons Foundation a two-year grant for \$439,000 to support the Contra Costa Safe Schools Coalition (CCSSC), a group of community-based organizations whose mission it is to create safer schools for LGBTQ youth and to reduce discrimination, name-calling, and homophobia in the schools. The California Endowment hopes that the grant will help implement A.B. 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000.

CCSSC includes GLSEN—San Francisco East Bay (which will coordinate the project); Center for Human Development; Community Violence Solutions; Gay-Straight Alliance Network; Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays—San Ramon Chapter; Contra Costa Health Services' Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs—TeenAge Program; Contra Costa Crisis Center; New Connections; Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa County; and STAND! Against Domestic Violence.

The coalition's goals include reducing verbal harassment (anti-gay comments and name calling) in schools and reducing LGBTQ youth isolation by increasing access to support services. CCSSC partners are implementing various strategies to achieve these goals. These include providing awareness and sensitivity training, implementing activist education for youth activists, establishing regional coalitions, increasing the number of regionally located safe havens and support groups, establishing safe allies and trained staff to provide services on school campuses, creating a coalition website, and creating a printed directory of services. The work of CCSSC will focus on 12 high schools across the county.

For more information about CCSSC, contact Julie Lienert at (925) 685-5480 x4 or [julie@glsen-sfeb.org](mailto:julie@glsen-sfeb.org).

<sup>1</sup> The 2001 National School Climate Survey: The School Related Experiences of Our Nation's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth. Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network, Office of Public Policy, 2001. [http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ARTICLES/pdf\\_file/1307.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ARTICLES/pdf_file/1307.pdf).

## TEEN CORNER:

From a member of the Queer Youth Action Team (QYAT):

"With the country in the middle of an economic slump, in the middle of war with Iraq, and California in the middle of a chaotic recall election, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) issues are being pushed aside unfairly. Fighting for the rights of LGBTQ youth in Contra Costa County are the members of the Queer Youth Action Team (QYAT) based out of the Center for Human Development in Pleasant Hill. Over the past 4 years, QYAT has worked alongside school districts throughout the county to implement anti-homophobia and HIV/AIDS prevention measures in hopes of achieving a safer school environment for teens. Currently, QYAT is working with the Mount Diablo Unified School District to implement such measures. With your help, we can once and for all end prejudice, inequality, and injustice in our schools and in our county."

For further information, please contact Nancy Lima, Adult Coordinator for QYAT, at (925) 687-8844 x307.

## RESOURCES

- [Advocates for Youth—Transitions, Vol. 14, No.4 \(about LGBTQ youth issues\)](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/transitions/transitions1404.pdf)  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/transitions/transitions1404.pdf>
- [MCH Library—Knowledge Path: Oral Health and Children and Adolescents](http://www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_oralhealth.html)  
[http://www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp\\_oralhealth.html](http://www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_oralhealth.html)
- [14 and Younger: The Sexual Behavior of Young Adolescents](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/youngteens/default.asp)  
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/youngteens/default.asp>
- [The First Time: Characteristics of Teens' First Sexual Relationships](https://secure.webfirst.com/childtrends.org/onlinecart/product.cfm?id=896)  
<https://secure.webfirst.com/childtrends.org/onlinecart/product.cfm?id=896>

If you would like to be added to the mailing list of Community Youth Focus or the Family, Maternal & Child Health Community Coalition, please e-mail [pparthas@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us](mailto:pparthas@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us).



CONTRA COSTA  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
FAMILY, MATERNAL &  
CHILD HEALTH PROGRAMS  
597 Center Avenue, Suite 365  
Martinez, California  
94553-4675

PH 925 313-6254  
FAX 925 313-6708