

Dental care access and unmet dental care needs among US workers: The National Health Interview Survey, 1997-2003.

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Background. Healthy People 2010 oral health objectives call for an increase in the proportion of adults who use the oral health care system annually. To assess progress toward this goal, the authors evaluated dental care utilization and the extent of unmet dental care needs of U.S. workers and their families.

Methods. The authors conducted sex-specific analyses by occupation of 135,004 U.S. worker participants in the nationally representative National Health Interview Surveys (NHIS) conducted from 1997 to 2003.

Results. The reported lack of oral health care within the preceding year ranged from 18.9 to 57.8 percent among male workers and from 17.6 to 50.0 percent among female workers. Sex-specific occupational groups with the highest rates of reported unmet dental care needs included male health service occupations (17.1 percent) and female construction and extractive trade workers (26.8 percent).

Conclusion. There are significant oral health care underutilization and high rates of unmet dental care needs among many U.S. worker groups. Strategies to increase regular dental visits for U.S. worker groups reporting low dental care access and high dental need are paramount.

Clinical Implications. Targeting strategic dental care access programs to identified U.S. worker groups reporting dental care access deficits can improve oral health.

Key Words. Oral health; surveillance; occupation; dental care access; unmet dental care need.

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