

What does Childhood Cancer do to the Teeth?

Summarized by Carina Nigg

What did we want to find out with our study?

We wanted to understand how common dental problems are in children and teenagers who survived cancer and whether dental problems are more likely after certain cancer treatments. We also compared their dental health to that of their siblings who never had cancer.

Why is this important?

Dental health isn't only about chewing. Problems like small teeth or cavities can affect speech, self-confidence, and overall well-being. Some cancer treatments can interfere with how teeth develop. By finding out who is most affected, we can help families and healthcare teams to protect children's dental health early on.

What did we do?

We surveyed 731 children and adolescents who had cancer and 144 of their healthy siblings living in Switzerland. We asked about their dental health - for example, whether they had cavities or unusually small teeth. We also reviewed cancer treatment details from the Swiss Childhood Cancer Registry.

What did we find out and what does this mean?

Many child and adolescent cancer survivors have healthy teeth. Still, certain dental problems occurred more often among survivors than their siblings: One in seven

reported missing or unusually small teeth. One in thirteen had problems with enamel (the hard surface of the tooth). Toddlers treated with chemotherapy or a stem cell transplant were especially affected. In contrast, cavities were just as common in survivors as in their siblings – about one in three children had them.

As part of follow-up care, childhood cancer survivors should attend a yearly dental examination to catch potential problems early. Ideally, healthcare practitioners record a child's dental health condition prior to cancer treatment. This helps with insurance coverage for future dental care related to treatment. Families can also support good dental health at home by encouraging regular tooth brushing, dental flossing, limiting sugar intake, avoiding smoking, and limiting alcohol drinking.

Reference: Nigg C, Matti C, Jörger P, et al. Dental Health of Childhood Cancer Survivors—A Report From the Swiss Childhood Cancer Survivor Study (SCCSS). *Pediatric Blood & Cancer*. 2025;72(5). doi:10.1002/pbc.31629

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