

Contact: KMR Communications, Inc.
P: 212.213.6444
F: 212.213.4699
info@kmrcommunications.com



KISSING & CAVITIES:

Could your man or woman be giving you more than sweet kisses?

New York, NY January 3, 2003 - Could something so intimate, sensual and fun be hazardous to your teeth? Well, according to a study published by the Journal of the American Dental Association, the answer is "yes." The same bacterium that cause general cavities may be transmissible through saliva while kissing. Bacteria buildup can result in an increase of oral acid, in turn ruining the tooth enamel and resulting in tooth decay and cavities.

Bacterium such as Streptococcus and Lacto-Bacillus are blamed for causing cavities and gum disease. New York City dentist and gum expert Dr. Clifford Williams explains, "Bacterium can be spread though direct or indirect contact. Indirect contact includes sharing infected objects such as eating utensils, toothbrushes, cups or food. Kissing is considered a direct contact."

So should you skip the kiss this Valentine's Day? According to Dr. Williams, if your partner has a healthy mouth, kissing may actually help to prevent cavities. The Academy of General Dentistry agrees. Saliva is the natural way of cleaning the mouth and getting rid of the food fragments that can cause cavities. Kissing intensely stimulates the production of saliva, hence protecting the teeth and gums.

However, if your partner's mouth has seen better days, watch out, because he or she may be exposing you to cavity inducing bacteria.

Fortunately, it's easy to find out the health status of your mouth. "A new dental exam called the Cavity Risk Test, determines an individual's level of bacteria. Based on the results, dentists can customize an appropriate regimen to decrease the harmful bacteria," he says.

So whether it's a Valentine kiss, a New Year's kiss or just a plain old smooch, make sure you are kissing with care. Keep your eyes wide open and get an "inside look" before puckering up.

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