

# KISSING & GINGIVITIS: NO LAUGHING MATTER THIS APRIL FOOL'S DAY

## New poll reveals Canadians in the dark about gingivitis transmissibility

**TORONTO, ON (April 1, 2005)** – Here's something to make you think twice before puckering up for a prank with your loved one this April Fool's Day: Studies show there may be a one-in-three chance of transmitting gingivitis-causing bacteria – one source of gum disease – through saliva.<sup>1</sup> Considering three out of four Canadians have gingivitis, the earliest and most easily treatable form of gum disease, odds are that you or your partner do too. Yet, if you're like nearly 80 per cent of us, you've been unaware up until now. But gingivitis is no joke – to reduce your risk experts say the best defence is a good offence this National Oral Health Month.

### Research Highlights Risk

Scientists and dentists have long suspected that gum disease-causing bacteria could be transmitted from person-to-person. In fact, a survey of Canadian dentists released today showcases that at least three quarters believe periodontal bacteria can be transmitted. And they're right: In a meta-analysis of research on the subject published in *Periodontology 2000*,<sup>2</sup> several studies showed transmission rates of anywhere from 30 to 75 per cent. In one such study of married couples, it was demonstrated that spouses of patients with periodontal disease were 20 to 30 per cent more likely to have poor oral health themselves than spouses of patients in optimal oral health.<sup>3</sup> Other research, printed in *Oral Microbiology and Immunology*, suggests the probability of spouses sharing two particular periodontal bacteria strains (*A. actinomycetemcomitans* and *P. gingivalis*) was found to be 36 per cent and 20 per cent respectively, while the probability that this similarity occurred by chance was a mere five per cent, suggesting transmission.<sup>4</sup> “Although it is difficult to absolutely confirm transmissibility in a given case, research to date suggests that some cases of periodontitis – or gum disease – may occur by

transmission,” says Dr. Michael Glogauer, periodontist, Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, and one of Canada’s foremost researchers on the role of oral health as it relates to overall health. “This problem goes beyond the research results, as I often see both husbands and wives in my clinic who share similar disease patterns.”

### **Kiss Gingivitis Goodbye**

Worried you might be the butt of more than a bad joke this April Fool’s Day? You’re not alone – 57 per cent of Canadians said they’d be concerned about getting gingivitis from another person, and nearly 40 per cent admit they would limit kissing if they knew their partner had gingivitis. On the flipside, a thoughtful 65 per cent of Canadians said they’d be concerned about transmitting gingivitis to their partner, whereas 22 per cent claim they wouldn’t care at all.

“While we’re just at the tip of the iceberg in this area of research, we do know two things for certain,” says Dr. Glogauer. “First, it appears that periodontal bacteria may be transmitted between partners. Second, even though bacterial transmission may occur, it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re automatically going to develop gum disease.” To better understand what goes on in our mouths, Dr. Glogauer explains, “White blood cells are normally present in our mouths, keeping the oral environment in healthy balance. But this equilibrium can be disturbed when someone with poor oral hygiene comes in contact with other, more dangerous periodontal bacteria. In response, our white blood cells rush to the source of the problem and compensate for the imbalance. This causes the redness, inflammation and bleeding often associated with gingivitis.” Bottom line: The key to oral health lies in maintaining that healthy equilibrium, and killing the germs that cause gingivitis and plaque is one way to help.

“Bacteria can be present indefinitely without evolving into gingivitis or full-blown periodontitis, as long as your mouth’s defences aren’t down,” says Dr. Glogauer. “That’s why it’s important to maintain the best possible oral hygiene so these types of bacteria are not welcome guests in the mouth,” he says. “Stopping gingivitis in its tracks is a good first step – since if left untreated, gingivitis can lead to periodontal disease. And evidence is mounting that your oral health affects your overall health – with links to heart disease, low birth weight, pre-term babies, and diabetes.”

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## **Flirting With Gingivitis?**

Are you doing all you can to reduce your susceptibility to periodontal bacteria? Probably not. While 92 per cent of Canadians rate their gingivitis-prevention routines as good or better, three quarters of us admit to not flossing regularly<sup>5</sup> – so we're not removing plaque from more than one third of the mouth's surfaces that can't be reached by brushing alone. This could explain why so many of us have gingivitis. Transmissibility might just be the wakeup call we need, as an overwhelming 86 per cent of Canadians would be willing to take additional steps to prevent the spread of gingivitis causing bacteria if they were informed it could be passed on.

So where to start? Before you restrict yourself to air-kissing, there is something you can do to prevent and treat gingivitis. A three-step routine is recommended, consisting of brushing, flossing, and rinsing with an antiseptic mouth rinse like Listerine, which has been clinically proven to reduce gingivitis by up to 34 per cent over your usual dental routine without Listerine.

Listerine has been a leader in Canadian oral care for more than a century. It is the only non-prescription mouthrinse that is recognized by the Canadian Dental Association to reduce and prevent the progress of gingivitis when used in a proper oral hygiene program. Cool Citrus Listerine Antiseptic Mouthwash was recently added to the line up of Cool Mint, Fresh Burst and Original flavours. For added protection against tartar build-up, use Listerine Tartar Control, and to boost resistance to cavities, use Fluoride Listerine. Listerine Mouthwash is available at retail outlets across Canada.

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The survey of Canadians was commissioned by Listerine Mouthwash to determine their knowledge of gingivitis transmissibility. This independent survey was conducted by Decima Research in winter of 2004-05. This national sample of 2,000 Canadian adults 18 years or older is accurate within +/- 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Listerine Mouthwash also commissioned a poll of 50 Canadian dentists to gauge their knowledge and opinions surrounding gingivitis transmissibility. This independent survey was conducted by Contemporary Research Centre in winter of 2004-05.

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**References:**

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<sup>1</sup> Asikainen S, Chen C, Alaluusua S, Slots J. Can one acquire periodontal bacteria and periodontitis from a family member? *Journal of the American Dental Association* 1997; 128 (pg.1263-1271).

<sup>2</sup> Asikainen S, Chen C. Oral ecology and person-to-person transmission of *Actinobacillus actinomycetemcomitans* and *Porphyromonas gingivalis*. *Periodontology 2000*, Volume 20, 1999 (pg. 65-81).

<sup>3</sup> Asikainen S, Chen C, Alaluusua S, Slots J. Can one acquire periodontal bacteria and periodontitis from a family member? *Journal of the American Dental Association* 1997; 128 (pg.1263-1271).

<sup>4</sup> Asikainen S, Chen C, Slots J. Likelihood of transmitting *Actinobacillus actinomycetemcomitans* and *Porphyromonas gingivalis* in families with periodontitis. *Oral Microbiology and Immunology* 1996; 11 (pg. 387 – 394).

<sup>5</sup> Payne, B.J. et al, Relationship between dental and general health behaviors in a Canadian population. *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* 1996; 56:198-204.