


[HOME](#) | [VIDEO](#) | [U.S.](#) | [WORLD](#) | [POLITICS](#) | [ENTERTAINMENT](#) | [TECH](#) | [HEALTH](#) | [LIFESTYLE](#) | [SHOWS](#) | [MORE](#)
[NOW](#) [ZIMMERMAN TRIAL](#) • [GEORGE ZIMMERMAN VERDICT](#) • [ZIMMERMAN VERDICT LIVE UPDATE](#) • [PACIFIC RIM](#) •

[HOME](#) > [HEALTH](#)

Man Dies From Toothache, Couldn't Afford Meds

A Cincinnati man without insurance died from a tooth infection because he couldn't afford his medication. (Getty Images)



By CARRIE GANN, ABC News Medical Unit
Sept. 2, 2011

A 24-year-old Cincinnati father died from a tooth infection this week because he couldn't afford his medication, offering a sobering reminder of the importance of oral health and the number of people without access to dental or health care.

According to [NBC affiliate WLWT](#), Kyle Willis' wisdom tooth started hurting two weeks ago. When dentists told him it needed to be pulled, he decided to forgo the procedure, because he was unemployed and had no health insurance.

When his face started swelling and his head began to ache, Willis went to the emergency room, where he received prescriptions for antibiotics and pain medications. Willis couldn't afford both, so he chose the pain medications.





The tooth infection spread, causing his brain to swell. He died Tuesday.

Calls to Willis' family were not immediately returned. University Hospital in Cincinnati, where Willis was admitted, did not comment, citing federal privacy laws.

"People don't realize that dental disease can cause serious illness," said Dr. Irvin Silverstein, a dentist at the University of California at San Diego. "The problems are not just cosmetic. Many people die from dental disease."

Willis' story is not unique. In 2007, 12-year-old [Deamonte Driver](#) also died when a tooth infection spread to his brain. The Maryland boy underwent two operations and six weeks of hospital care, totaling \$250,000. Doctors said a routine \$80 tooth extraction could have saved his life. His family was uninsured and had recently lost its Medicaid benefits, keeping Deamonte from having dental surgery.

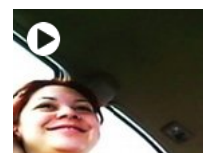
HOT RIGHT NOW

-  [Zimmerman Verdict: Not Guilty](#)
-  [Florida Police Braced for George Zimmerman Verdict](#)
-  [Zimmerman Jury Asks for Manslaughter Clarification](#)
-  [Zimmerman Jury Adjourns Without a Verdict](#)
- [US Official: Israel Strikes in Syria](#)

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...



Smart Car Theft
Victim Finds Alleged



Woman Caught on
Tape Allegedly



Royal Baby
Highlights

PHOTO GALLERIES



View: Wookies Go From 'Star Wars' to
Everyday Life
Entertainment

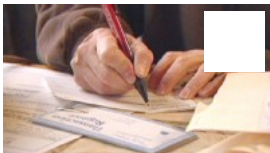


Getty Images

A Cincinnati man without insurance died from... [View Full Size](#)



Higher Risk of Death for the Uninsured [Watch Video](#)



Understand Your Health Care Coverage [Watch Video](#)



Survey: Health Insurance Premiums Jump [Watch Video](#)

"When people are unemployed or don't have insurance, where do they go? What do they do?" Silverstein said.

"People end up dying, and these are the most treatable, preventable diseases in the world."

Getting access to dental care is particularly tough for low-income adults and children, and it's getting tougher as the economy worsens. In April, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that 33 percent of people surveyed skipped dental care or dental checkups because they couldn't afford them. A 2003 report by the U.S. Surgeon General found that 108 million Americans had no dental insurance, nearly 2.5 times the number who had no health insurance.

Trips to the dentist aren't the only expenses hard-up Americans are skipping. An August report by the Commonwealth Fund found that 72 percent of people who lost their health insurance when they lost their jobs said they skipped needed health care or did not fill prescriptions because of cost.

"People want to believe there's a safety net that catches all of these people, and there isn't," said Dr. Glenn Stream, president-elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians. He noted that it is often young men who are the most likely to lack health coverage.

Dr. Jim Jirjis, director of general internal medicine at Vanderbilt University, said people, like Willis, without access to care often die of conditions that were much more

common decades ago.

"He [Willis] might as well have been living in 1927," Jirjis said. "All of the advances we've made in medicine today and are proud of, for people who don't have coverage, you might as well never have developed those."

There are a number of free dental clinics in operation around the country, where dentists volunteer to provide care to those without health insurance. But even if Willis had access to a free dental clinic, Stream said he still may not have been able to get the care he needed for his infection. "The wait is often months at these clinics, and this young man died within two weeks of his problem," Stream said.

Silverstein operates three free dental clinics in the San Diego area. "We're overwhelmed right now," he said. "We can't take any new patients."

More From ABC News



Dog Walks Puppy in Adorable Video



Massive Dust Storm Blankets Parts of Arizona



Leah Remini Leaves Church of Scientology

From Around the Web

MORE FROM ABC NEWS

[Study: Uninsured Barely Get Health Care](#)

[Jawbreakers? Taking Stress Out on Teeth](#)

[What's Rotting Our Kids' Teeth?](#)

[ADA Moves to Increase Mouthwash Awareness](#)

[Higher Risk of Death for the Uninsured](#)

[Understand Your Health Care Coverage](#)

[More Video »](#)

[Follow @abc](#) on Twitter, become a fan on [Facebook](#)

[Recommend](#) 45k

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

[Share](#)

Commenting on this article is closed.

[View All Comments \(645\)](#)

mtioran
11:47 AM EST
Jan 31, 2013

the infection did not kill him.the dentist did, who refused him because he had no moneyblood suckers, all of them

Change something
6:52 PM EDT
Oct 11, 2012

The current surgical focus of "sick-care" rather than health-care in oral health is not working. Too much attention is spent on "drilling and filling" and cosmetic dentistry rather than finding effective ways to ward off the need to drill and fill. In the current system there is no incentive for change. Why fix it it is so profitable right?The longer we keep our teeth and gums healthy, the better off we are. How to do that?Imagine ten years from now when clinics run by dental hygienists are everywhere (like in Switzerland and most of Canada since 2007) and their singular product/service is prevention. Imagine that through competition and research, they have perfected the way in which to communicate the importance of prevention, perfected systems and programs to prevent disease and competed with each other in order to increase effectiveness. Would you say that the average person's health will be better? For sure!It is already being done at no cost to taxpayers in Ontario, Alberta and in BC.Here is why and how to make it happen....<http://oralhygienetoday.wordpress.com/2012/10/03/reducing-dental-cost-easily-breaking-a-monopoly>

19Lancer81
7:41 PM EDT
Aug 05, 2012

How ironic that the video about mortality and health insurance features Jorge Rodriguez who is a MDVIP primary care doctor. If you want to have a MDVIP doctor, you have to pay approximately \$1500 per year.

[View All Comments \(645\)](#)

TODAY IN ABC NEWS

[ABC News Home »](#)



George Zimmerman Jury to Decide His Fate



Royal Baby's Birth a Money Making Machine



Wienermobile Competition Celebrates National Hot Dog Month

SECTIONS

- U.S.
- World
- Politics
- Weird News
- Investigative
- Health
- Entertainment
- Money
- Technology
- Travel
- Recipes
- News Topics
- Live Blog

SHOWS

- NY Med
- Good Morning America
- World News with Diane Sawyer
- Nightline
- ABC's The Lookout
- This Week with George Stephanopoulos
- 20/20
- Primetime
- What Would You Do?
- ABC.com
- Royal Baby

TOOLS

- iPad App
- Register
- Sign In
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs
- Emails & News Alerts
- Message Boards
- RSS Headlines

ABOUT

- Contact Us
- Feedback
- Advertising
- Privacy Policy
- Interest-Based Ads
- Terms of Use
- ABC News Store
- Site Map
- Authors List
- ABC News | Univision
- Go.com



External links are provided for reference purposes. ABC News is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites. Copyright © 2013 ABC News Internet Ventures. Yahoo! - ABC News Network

[BACK TO TOP](#)