Objective: To evaluate dental caries prevalence in schoolchildren aged five to 12 years from urban and rural areas of Ponta Grossa, PR, Brazil, and their self-perception of oral health. Method: This study was a cross-sectional investigation involving 705 children from four public schools, being 293 schoolchildren from the rural area and 412 from the urban area. Caries prevalence was recorded following the WHO criteria, using the DMFT and dmft indexes. A questionnaire relative to the self-perception of oral health, pain and dental consultation was also employed. The Chi-square and Mann-Whitney tests were used for statistical analysis with a significance level of 5%. The differences between the results of rural and urban schools were analyzed using the SPSS for Windows v. 15.0 and EPI-INFO v. 3.5.1 softwares. Results: There was higher caries prevalence among the rural schoolchildren (86.7%) than for the urban ones (63.1%) (p<0.001). There were also more toothache reports in the rural than in the urban area (68.9% vs 59.9%, p=0.014). The mean DMFT in the rural area was 1.0 and the dmft was 3.87. In the urban area, the mean DMFT was 0.39 and the mean dmft was 2.19 (p<0.001). The DMFT and dmft indexes of the schoolchildren living in the rural area were significantly higher than those of children living in the urban zone. Severe caries prevalence was also higher in the rural area. Most children reported that they had already visited a dentist before and they were satisfied with their oral health, with no significant difference between the areas. Conclusion: There was a better oral condition among schoolchildren from the urban area compared with those from the rural area.

Keywords
Dental caries, Epidemiology, Urban population, Rural population.