



NEWS RELEASE

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New survey finds kids' oral health doesn't make the grade

~February is National Children's Dental Health Month~

Stevens Point, WI (February 3, 2015) – Only 28 percent of American parents would give their kids an “A” grade for oral health, according to a new survey of more than 1,300 parents released today by Delta Dental¹ in conjunction with National Children’s Dental Health Month. In fact, nearly nine of 10 parents (86 percent) say their children’s oral health isn’t as good as it could be.

A majority of parents (51 percent) understand that oral care habits – rather than genetics or what their kids eat – are most responsible for their children’s oral health. Yet, almost one-third of children don’t brush twice daily, and 61 percent of children don’t floss daily.

The Delta Dental survey indicates that these poor habits start early, and American parents may be contributing to their children’s tooth decay long before they can brush or floss on their own.

“A child’s dental health is set in motion from a very young age. Tooth decay can develop any time after the first tooth comes in, starting around six months old, and good oral health habits should begin even earlier,” says Dr. Fred Eichmiller, DDS, Delta Dental of Wisconsin’s vice president and science officer.

Children’s baby teeth need to be brushed

As soon as a child’s first tooth comes in, it should be brushed. But 63 percent of American parents didn’t begin brushing for their children when the first tooth came in. Instead, they waited until there were a few or even a full set of teeth.

The first tooth – and all subsequent teeth – should be brushed gently with a soft, child-sized toothbrush and a rice-grain size smear of fluoride toothpaste twice a day until age two. A small, pea-sized amount of toothpaste should be used from ages two to six. Even before children get the first tooth, the mouth and gums should be wiped with a soft, damp cloth or infant toothbrush after feedings.

“Poorly established brushing habits have helped contribute to so many American kids having cavities,” says Eichmiller. “These habits set a foundation for children as they get older. It’s important for parents

to get their children in a routine as soon as the first tooth appears, so they don't question the habit later on."

Children's bottles and sippy cups at naptime and bedtime should be filled with water

Many parents don't know that children shouldn't be put to bed with a bottle or sippy cup, unless it contains water. Alarming, 46 percent of parents with children under age three put their child down for a nap or bedtime with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice at least once a week or more.

"Fruit juice, and even plain milk, can be harmful to young kids' oral health. Both beverages have many grams of sugar that, when left to bathe on teeth at naptime or overnight, can result in tooth decay," says Eichmiller.

Parents should only fill bottles or sippy cups with water, except at meal and snack times. And anytime children are given sugary beverages or snacks, teeth should be either rinsed with water or brushed afterward.

Some other important habits for healthy smiles:

- Once any two teeth are touching, parents should floss, or help the child floss, once a day.
- Children should first visit the dentist within six months of getting the first tooth – and no later than the first birthday.
- Parents should eliminate saliva-transferring behaviors – such as sharing utensils and toothbrushes and cleaning a pacifier with their mouths – which are all activities that can pass harmful bacteria to a child.

About Delta Dental of Wisconsin

Delta Dental of Wisconsin is a not-for-profit dental service corporation offering benefit services, claims processing, and plan administration to employers throughout Wisconsin since 1962. The company is headquartered in Stevens Point, with sales offices in Milwaukee and Madison, and provides benefits and services to more than 1.4 million subscribers and their family members. Delta Dental administers dental benefits for more Wisconsin companies than any other insurance carrier. As a member of the nationwide Delta Dental Plans Association, the company is able to offer employees of Wisconsin-based companies the same dental benefits to wherever they are located in the United States.

About Delta Dental Plans Association

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association (deltadental.com), based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of independent dental service corporations. Delta Dental provides dental benefits programs to 62 million Americans in more than 114,000 employee groups throughout the country. For more information, visit our website at deltadental.com.

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¹*Kelton, a leading global insights firm, conducted the 2015 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted nationally via email with 1,325 parents of children ages 12 and under from Dec. 2, 2014 to Jan. 2, 2015. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of error is ±2.7 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*