



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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American children need to brush longer, more often *- Make brushing fun to improve overall oral health -*

OAK BROOK, IL (February 1, 2010) – Poor brushing and not enough brushing are the biggest obstacles keeping children from having excellent oral health and are the areas that cause caregivers the greatest concern.

That's one of the key findings from a survey¹ of American children's oral health, conducted in 2009 on behalf of Delta Dental Plans Association, the nation's leading dental benefits provider. Delta Dental commissioned the survey of primary caregivers to gain greater knowledge about the state of children's oral health.

While nearly three in five Americans (58 percent) report that their child's overall oral health is excellent, more than a third of the survey respondents (36 percent) admit their child brushes his or her teeth less than once a day. They recognize the frequency as "not enough," despite the fact that nearly all those surveyed (95 percent) with children 2 to 6 years old say they supervise or assist with brushing.

Among those who rate their child's oral health as less than excellent, 45 percent say their children brush their teeth for a minute or less, though dentists recommend spending two minutes or more on each brushing. And, while the American Association of Pediatric Dentists recommends daily flossing, a quarter of the survey respondents say their child never flosses; only 7 percent report their child flosses daily.

Another 20 percent of survey respondents say the biggest obstacle is a poor diet – not enough fruits and vegetables – or too many sweets. Diet issues are compounded by

sugary treats used as rewards. Among those who give food treats to their child who is four years or older, three quarters give sugary foods as a reward. Also, more than half of Americans (55%) say their child consumes soft drinks at least once a week. One in ten Americans admits that their child consumes soft drinks every day.

Making Brushing Fun

Getting children to brush regularly, and correctly, can be a real challenge. Here are some easy ideas to encourage brushing:

- **Trade places:** Tired of prying your way in whenever it's time to brush those little teeth? Why not reverse roles and let the child brush your teeth? It's fun for them and shows them the right way to brush. Just remember, do not share a toothbrush. According to the American Dental Association, sharing a toothbrush may result in an exchange of microorganisms and an increased risk of infections.
- **Take turns:** Set a timer and have the child brush their teeth for 30 seconds. Then you brush their teeth for 30 seconds. Repeat this at least twice.
- **Call in reinforcements:** If children stubbornly neglect to brush or floss, maybe it's time to change the messenger. Call the dental office before the next checkup and let them know what's going on. The same motivational message might be heeded if it comes from a third party, especially the dentist.

“Americans say they understand that proper brushing technique is critical to children’s oral health,” said Jed J. Jacobson, DDS, MS, MPH, chief science officer and senior V.P. of Delta Dental. “But there’s clearly a need for more education, more frequently, to teach practices that will ensure lifelong oral health. And, since people overwhelmingly prefer the dentist as their primary information source, dental benefits that encourage visits to the dentist are crucial.”

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association (www.deltadental.com) based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to more than 54 million Americans in more than 89,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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¹ Morpace Inc. conducted the 2009 “Children’s Oral Health Survey.” Random 15-minute telephone interviews were conducted nationally with 914 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. Respondents with multiple children were asked to think about their youngest child when answering questions.