



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Oral Health Knowledge Gap Contributes to Children's Issues

- 87 percent agree: good medical and dental care equally important -

OAK BROOK, IL (September 14, 2009) – While a majority of Americans rate their children's oral health as "excellent," there are clear gaps in understanding of basic oral health procedures and actual behavior.

That's one of the key findings from a survey¹ of American children's oral health, conducted on behalf of Delta Dental Plans Association, the nation's leading dental benefits provider.

One example: Only 36 percent of the respondents completely agree that a child should go to the dentist by age 1 or within six months after the first tooth erupts, even though that's the time recommended by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD). Two-thirds of those surveyed said their child had seen a dentist, but the average age of the first visit was 2.6 years.

Delta Dental commissioned the survey of primary caregivers to build greater knowledge about the state of children's oral health.

Nearly nine of 10 Americans (87 percent) agree that it is equally important to get good medical care and dental care. Children covered by dental insurance are much more likely to have visited the dentist than uninsured children, 69 percent versus 54 percent. Covered children also made their first visit to the dentist at an earlier age, at a mean of 2.5 years, compared to 3 years for uninsured children. And more than 85 percent of survey respondents who have insurance for their child rate dental coverage as "very important."

Other key findings:

- About three in five Americans (58 percent) report that their child’s overall oral health is excellent.
- Among those who rate their child’s oral health as less than excellent, 45 percent say that not enough brushing or poor brushing technique is the biggest obstacle to excellent oral health. Another 20 percent say the biggest obstacle is a poor diet – not enough fruits and vegetables – or too many sweets.
- While the AAPD recommends daily flossing, a quarter of the survey respondents say their child never flosses; only 7 percent report their child flosses daily.
- Among children who have never visited a dentist, or who have not visited a dentist in the past year, the most mentioned reason was that the child was too young or did not have enough teeth yet.
- About one in five (18 percent) survey respondents report their child has had a cavity in the past year. Among those children who have had cavities, nearly one in five (17 percent) experienced four or more cavities.

Brushing Technique a Challenge

More than a third of the survey respondents (36 percent) admit their child brushes his or her teeth less than once a day. They also 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.

Similarly, nearly half (45 percent) of caregivers say their children brush their teeth for a minute or less – dentists recommend spending two minutes or more on each brushing.

“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. In 2007, Delta Dental formed a partnership with the National Head Start Association to help improve the oral health of the nation’s children at a critical time in their development.

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¹ *Morpace Inc. conducted the 2009 Delta Dental Children’s Oral Health Survey. Random 15-minute telephone interviews were conducted nationally with 914 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of error is ±3.2 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*