



## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

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### Oral Piercings Pose Potential Health Care Risks

Oak Brook, Ill. (March 2009) -- Like clothing and hairstyles, oral piercings give teens and adults a way to express themselves. While trendy, this fashion statement poses a number of potential oral and overall health care risks.

“Anyone considering an oral piercing should consult a dentist to discuss the possible side effects,” says Dr. Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association, “or if you already have an oral piercing, make sure to schedule routine dental exams so a dentist can check for problems.”

Some potential complications of oral piercings include:

- Swelling – Piercing may cause swelling of the tongue. According to the American Dental Association, in extreme cases a severely swollen tongue can actually close off the airway and prevent breathing.
- Prolonged bleeding – A blood vessel punctured while piercing may cause severe bleeding.
- Damage to the sublingual salivary glands - An improperly placed tongue piercing may damage the sublingual salivary glands, which produce five percent of saliva entering the oral cavity.
- Aspiration (choking) - Jewelry may become loose in the mouth, creating a choking hazard.
- Plaque build-up – Plaque may build up on piercings, requiring more frequent cleanings.
- Damage to the teeth and gums - Jewelry may come in contact with both the teeth and gums, causing chipped or cracked teeth or gingival (gum) recession.
- Allergic reaction – Jewelry containing certain metals may cause an allergic reaction.
- Nerve damage – A piercing that strikes a nerve may cause nerve damage, leading to numbness or loss of sensation at the piercing site.
- Infection – The wound from the piercing, coupled with teeming bacteria in the mouth, may create an increased risk of infection.

“If you decide to get an oral piercing and complications arise, schedule an appointment with your dentist,” says Dr. Anderson. “Dentists are trained to monitor and manage oral health problems and will work with a physician to manage more serious conditions.”

Also, make sure to follow any home-care instructions, including cleaning, provided by your dentist or piercing specialist. This may help prevent immediate, short-term or long-term complications. Your dentist can prescribe an antimicrobial rinse to help keep the pierced site and jewelry clean.

“Whether a piercing is through the cheek, lip or tongue, proper oral hygiene measures are critical,” says Dr. Max Anderson, “and may help reduce the risks of some damaging side effects of oral piercing.”

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association ([www.deltadental.com](http://www.deltadental.com)) based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of 39 independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 51 million Americans in more than 93,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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