



2009 Children's Oral Health Survey



Improving the Oral Health of Children and Their Families

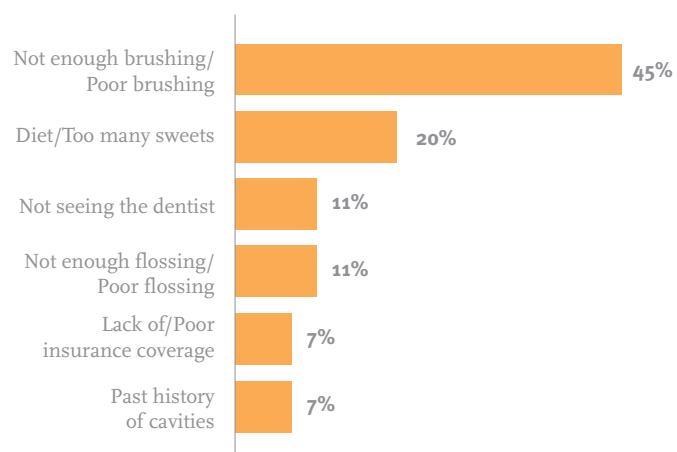
As a national system of not-for-profit dental service organizations and the nation's largest dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental is proudly committed to improving the oral health of the nation's children and their families. Our member companies are passionately engaged in this objective, working with caregivers and children to promote oral health knowledge and remove barriers to care for disadvantaged and at-risk children.

We commissioned a national survey of children's primary caregivers to gain insight about the oral health knowledge of caregivers and the status of their children's oral health. Michigan-based Morpace Inc. conducted random 15-minute telephone interviews with 914 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. With our research, we will help educate and improve the oral health of Americans.

The survey revealed that 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.

Poor brushing technique is the greatest obstacle to children having excellent oral health.

Obstacles to Children Having Excellent Oral Health
(Among Those Who Rate Less than Excellent – Top Mentions)



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009

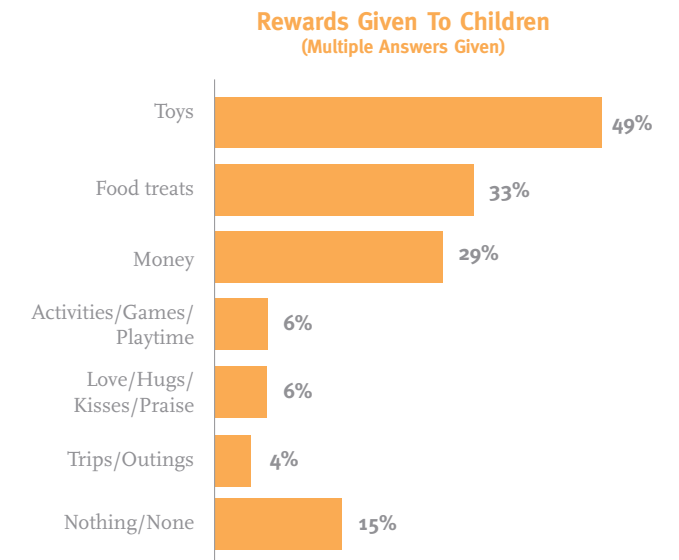
About three in five Americans (58 percent) participating in the 2009 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey report their child's overall oral health is excellent. However, among those who rate their child's oral health as less than excellent, 45 percent say that not enough brushing or poor brushing technique is the biggest obstacle to excellent oral health.

Over one-third (36 percent) of respondents say their child brushes his or her teeth less than twice a day and nearly half (45 percent) say their child brushes for one minute or less. As children's teeth begin to come in, it becomes increasingly important that they are brushed for at least two minutes twice daily with a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing fluoride.



Poor diet is another obstacle to children having excellent oral health.

Aside from not enough brushing and poor brushing technique, another 20 percent of respondents say the biggest obstacle preventing their child from having excellent oral health is a poor diet or too many sweets. One-third of Americans say they reward their child with food treats. And among those who give food treats, 78 percent give sugary foods as a reward.



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009

Make Brushing Fun for Children

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

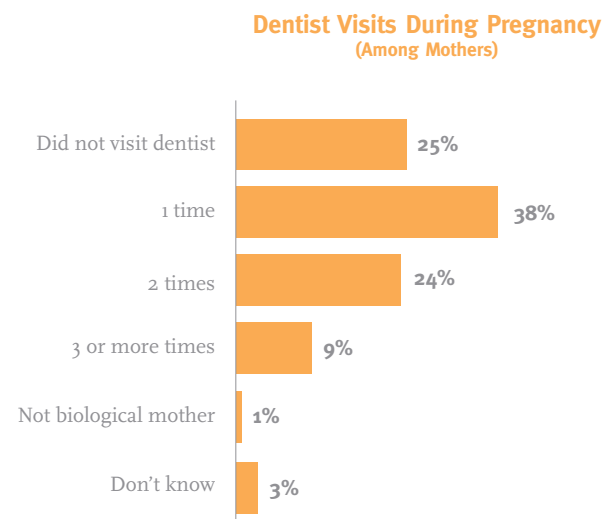
Trade places: Tired of prying your way in whenever it's time to brush those little teeth? Why not reverse roles and let the child brush your teeth? It's fun for them and shows them the right way to brush. Just remember, do not share a toothbrush. According to the American Dental Association, sharing 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.



Pregnant women should visit the dentist more often.



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009

Most pregnant women in America don't see their dentists for important oral health care nearly as often as recommended, which can cause ongoing health problems for both the mother and baby. In fact, a quarter of pregnant women didn't see the dentist at all during pregnancy and 38 percent visited the dentist just once during their term.

According to the Academy of Periodontology, 50 percent of women get "pregnancy gingivitis," a gum disease that makes gums sore and swollen. Research shows pregnant women with gum disease may be more likely to give birth to low-weight or pre-term babies, who are at risk for many serious diseases.

Women should get a thorough dental exam if they are planning to become pregnant and they should get their teeth professionally cleaned while expecting. Dentists can identify and provide treatment for gum and teeth problems during routine checkups.



Good oral health begins at birth.

The Children's Oral Health Survey suggests that caregivers recognize the importance of oral health care for infants, but don't always understand the techniques that promote oral health. For instance, the American Academy of Family Physicians recommends that care for a child's gums should begin at birth, but 35 percent of caregivers clean their baby's gums just a few times a week, or less.

Caregivers should gently wipe their baby's gums with a soft, wet cloth after each feeding. When primary teeth begin to appear, they should be cleaned with a soft, child-sized toothbrush and a pea-sized dab of children's toothpaste, twice a day.



Also, only 40 percent of survey respondents strongly agree that caregivers can pass dental disease to their child by sharing utensils, or by cleaning a pacifier in their own mouth and giving it to the baby. When in fact, cavity-causing bacteria present in a caregiver's mouth can be transmitted by saliva to the child. An act as simple as sharing a spoon or straw with a child can transfer that bacteria into the child's mouth and increase his or her risk for cavities.

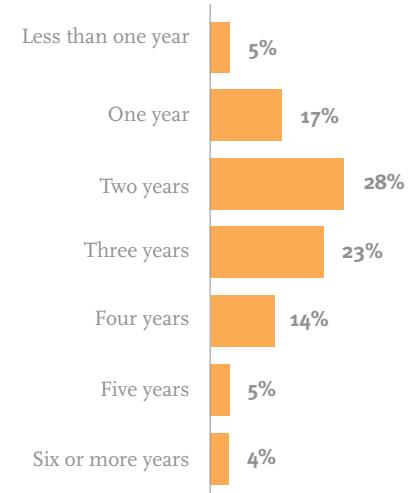
Caregivers should not share utensils with their child, and instead of cleaning a pacifier in their own mouth, they should wash it with soap and water, rinse, and then return to the baby.



Most American children first visit the dentist far later than recommended.

Most American children don't see their family dentist until they are well over 2 years old, far later than is recommended by both dental and medical professionals. The survey of primary caregivers revealed that, for those children who had seen a dentist – and 34 percent had not – the average age at the initial visit was 2.6 years. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends that a child go to the dentist by age 1 or within six months after the first tooth erupts.

Age of Child When First Visited Dentist
(Among Those Who Have Been to Dentist)



MEAN = 2.6 Years
Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009

Nearly one in five Americans say their child has had a cavity in the past year.

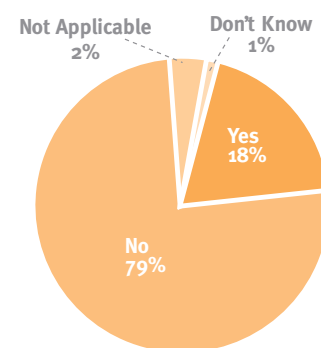
Close to a fifth (18 percent) of Americans say their child had at least one cavity during the past year. Among those who had a cavity, 47 percent had more than one, and 17 percent had four or more.

According to the Surgeon General's report on Oral Health in America, no chronic childhood disease is as widespread as cavities – it is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. The good news is that cavities and many other oral health issues are almost entirely preventable. By establishing good oral hygiene and nutrition habits early on, along with other preventive care strategies, children can have a great start toward long-term oral health.

Young children can have a tough time verbalizing their dental pain. Some signs that might indicate that a child is having an oral health problem include:

- difficulties concentrating on tasks
- easily distracted
- anxious
- fatigued
- irritable
- withdrawal from normal activities
- changes in appetite or avoidance of certain foods

Cavities in Teeth in Past Year

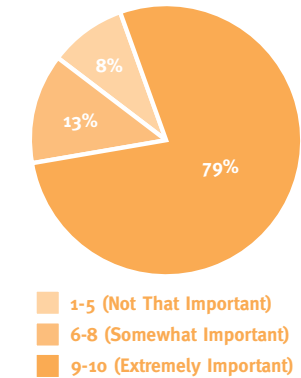


Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009

Four in five Americans say dental benefits are extremely important.

Four in five (79 percent) survey respondents say that dental benefits are extremely important. Eighty percent say their child is covered by dental benefits. The survey also showed that children covered by dental benefits are much more likely to visit the dentist than uninsured children, 69 percent versus 54 percent. Children covered by dental benefits 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.

Importance of Dental Benefits
Respondents answered on an importance scale of 1 to 10 (10 is high)



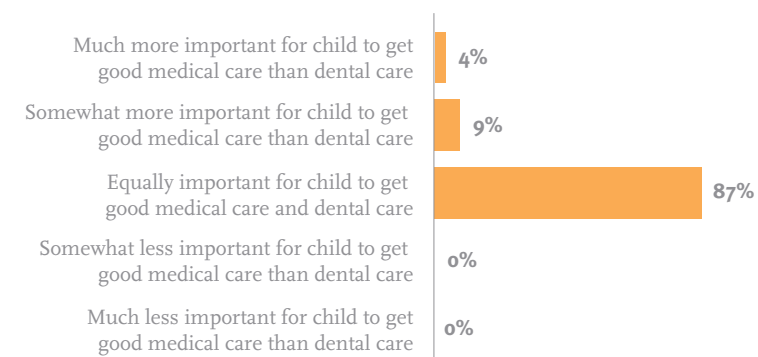
Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009




For nearly nine in 10 Americans, good dental care is equally as important as medical care.

87 percent of survey respondents agreed that it's equally important for their children to get good medical care and dental care.

Medical Care vs. Dental Care



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2009



We're on a mission to improve oral health.

Information gathered in the 2009 Children's Oral Health Survey is one example of our commitment to improve America's oral health. As a national system of dental service organizations and the nation's largest dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental Plans Association and its member companies support programs that focus on preventing dental disease, expanding access to care, advancing dental science and understanding the connections between oral and overall health. Since 2007, Delta Dental and the National Head Start Association have partnered to fight poor oral health among children.



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