



The State of America's Oral Health Report

Commissioned by Delta Dental Plans Association



Table of contents

- 1. Foreword 03
- 2. Executive summary 04
- 3. Oral health is critically important to overall health..... 06
- 4. Americans are practicing proper oral care habits at home 08
- 5. Americans are prioritizing preventive visits to the dentist 10
- 6. Dental insurance promotes optimal oral health 11
- 7. About the research 13

Foreword from James W. Hutchison

President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association

We are in a new era of healthcare in America. The public health crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic made healthcare challenges and inequities more apparent than ever. As the nation's leading dental insurance provider, our mission is to improve access to oral healthcare, elevate the critical role of oral health in overall health, and address health disparities. And that mission is more critical now than ever before.

To meet the needs of our customers, providers, partners, and communities, the Delta Dental companies are leading innovative thinking and identifying solutions to help more Americans achieve optimal overall health. A central part of that work is the continued measurement, assessment, and analysis of consumers' oral health behaviors, which we do on an annual basis as published in this "State of America's Oral Health Report."

This report, which captures data from consumers' behaviors throughout 2020, provides new insights into the greater public awareness of the connections between oral health and overall health, and while it is promising to see this continued growth in understanding, there is more work to be done. As we look ahead, Delta Dental will continue to lead the dialogue concerning oral health's critical role in mental, physical, and emotional health and the important place of oral healthcare in the overall healthcare conversation.

James W. Hutchison
President & CEO

Delta Dental Plans Association

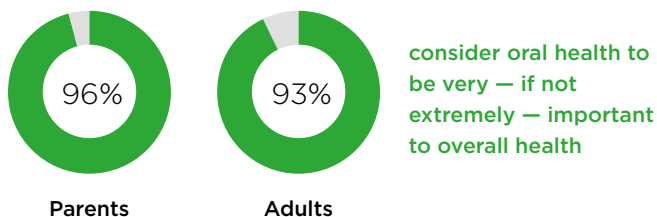


Executive summary

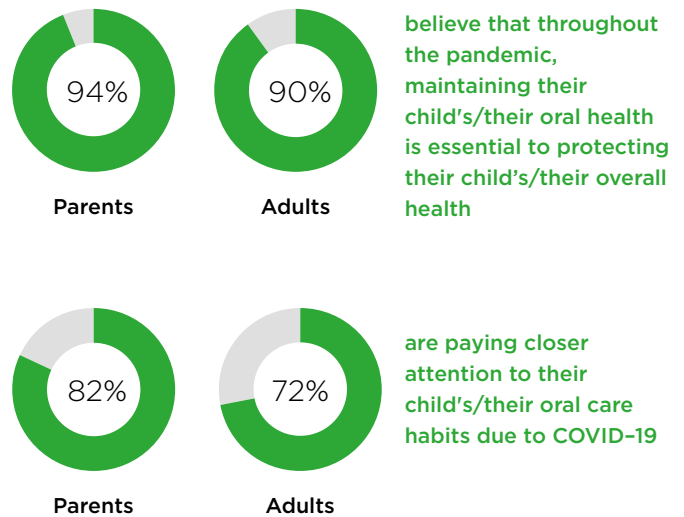
Oral health plays a critical role in overall health. Serious health issues like heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure have been linked to poor oral health. **It is vital that Americans understand the connection to safeguard their future health and well-being by making their oral health a priority today.**

This report features Delta Dental Plans Association-commissioned research that surveyed American adults and parents of children 12 and under. The findings reflect how these audiences thought about their oral health and what they did to properly nurture it both at home and with their dentist during 2020.




While most Americans report they understand the importance of oral health as it relates to overall health, the research suggests that many are unaware of how the two are actually connected. In fact, many are unable to identify medical conditions that are linked to poor oral health. Delta Dental is committed to improving awareness and understanding of this critical connection. And when it comes to their personal oral health, most adults and children are not immune to dental issues, including cavities, pain or toothache, and tooth sensitivity. These issues, especially when left unaddressed, can impact more than just physical health and comfort, but also everyday life, resulting in lost sleep, work, and school.



Good oral health starts at home, and a majority of Americans indicated they made their oral health a priority and are paying closer attention to their oral care habits at home as a result of the pandemic. The average American adult and child follow recommended guidelines for brushing, flossing, and using mouthwash at home. Many of these good oral health habits are born from a desire to prevent tooth decay and dental issues and even as a means of improving their overall health in the long-term.



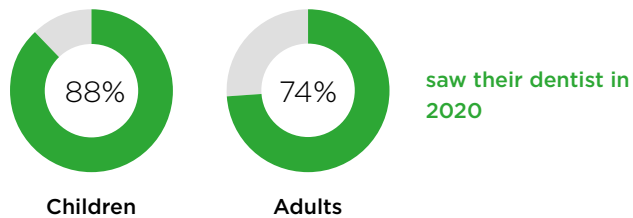
In 2020, adults and children followed recommended guidelines for oral care habits at home:

-  Brushed their teeth twice a day
-  Flossed once a day
-  Used mouthwash once a day

Executive summary

Americans visit their dentist regularly to stay on top of their oral health and view these visits as critical.

While adults and children made it a point to see their dentist in 2020 to decrease their risk of experiencing serious oral health issues or address current dental concerns, receiving such care was not without its challenges.



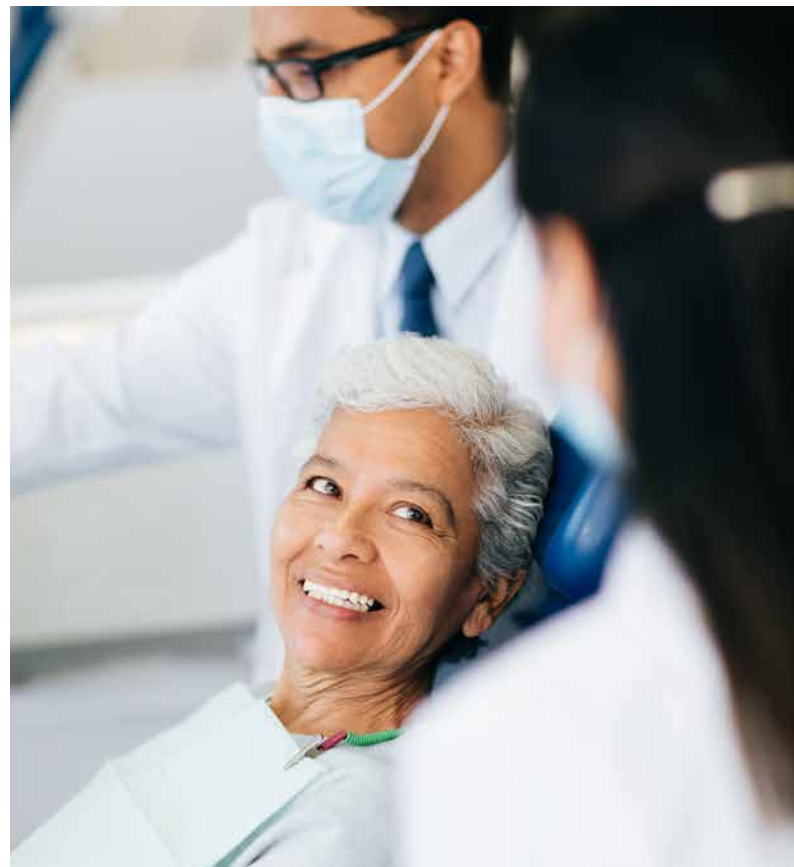
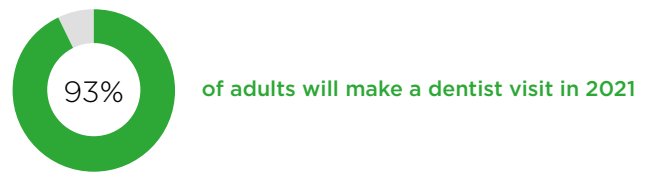
Dental insurance plays a key role in ensuring

Americans get the dental care they need. Adults and children with insurance were more likely than those without to have visited a dentist for preventive care in 2020, which is consistent with past trends. A large majority of adults and children who currently have dental insurance feel their coverage allows them to maintain good oral health. They recognize the peace of mind it offers, the relief from having to worry about dental emergencies, and the opportunity to lead a healthy life. Many also see the cost savings dental insurance brings and consider it well worth the cost. However, dental insurance remains out of reach for millions of Americans who express concerns over the cost of coverage and out-of-pocket costs.



9 in 10 adults with dental insurance indicate that having coverage is well worth the cost

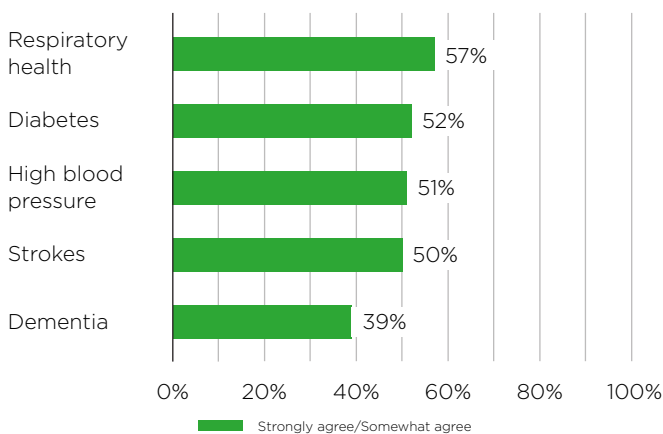
As more and more Americans become aware of how to improve their overall health through oral healthcare, we are optimistic that Americans will continue to seek the care they need even amid the pandemic. **In fact, nearly all Americans plan to visit the dentist, secure dental insurance if they are currently uninsured, and pay closer attention to their oral care habits at home in 2021.**



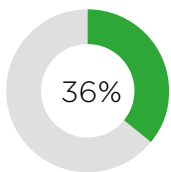
Oral health is critically important to overall health

While nearly all adults (93%) and parents (96%) report they consider oral health to be very – if not extremely – important to overall health, many aren't aware of the serious health issues linked to poor oral health or the terminology associated with dental issues that could lead to other, more severe or disruptive health conditions:

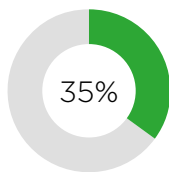
Consumer agreement with oral health's connection to overall health



Fewer than 2 in 5 adults are familiar with the terms **Bruxism** and **Caries**:



of adults are familiar with the term **Bruxism**. (**Bruxism** – teeth grinding and/or clenching)



of adults are familiar with the term **Caries**. (**Caries** – the process of tooth decay)



Oral health affects more than your mouth. Studies show oral health is connected to our overall health in many important ways. As a patient, you should: Let your dentist know if you are pregnant, have diabetes, or high blood pressure. Let your doctor know if you have dental issues or are using medications related to oral surgery. Make sure you are sharing information with both your doctor and your dentist.

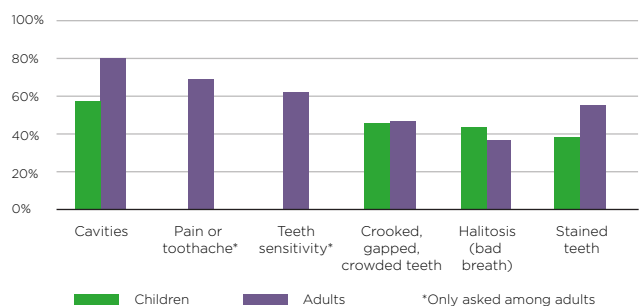


— Teri Barichello
DMD, Vice President, Chief Dental Officer,
Delta Dental of Oregon & Alaska

Regarding personal oral health, there is certainly room for improvement. Only 1 in 3 (34%) parents believe their child currently has “excellent oral health.” While this does represent an increase from the 29 percent who reported the same at this time last year, 3 in 4 (77%) moms and dads believe their child’s oral health is not as good as it could be right now.

Many likely feel this way because adults and children alike are not immune to oral health issues.

Percent of consumers who have ever experienced common oral health issues



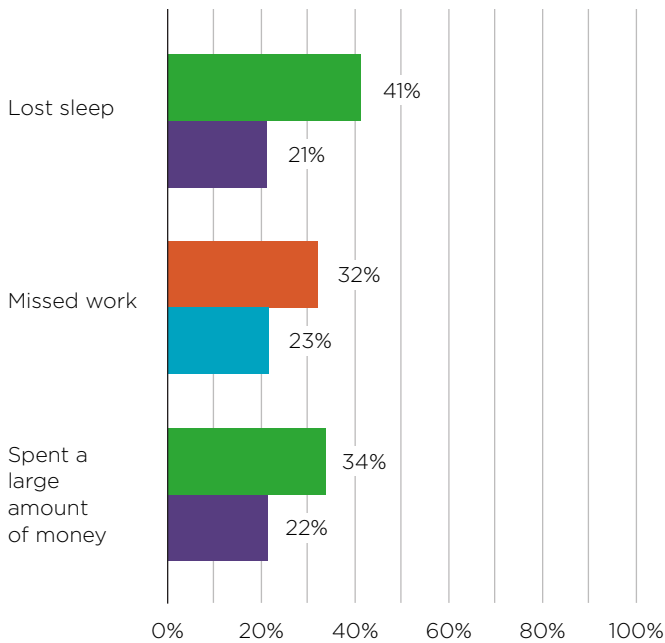
Oral health is critically important to overall health

And some issues are on the rise. For example, the average number of cavities per child has increased from 1 to 2 across the past 12 months.

When oral health issues arise, it may not just be physical discomfort that adults and children face.

More than 1 in 2 parents (57%) and adults (51%) have faced a number of other unwanted consequences as a result:

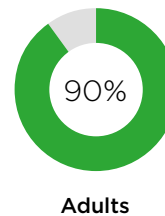
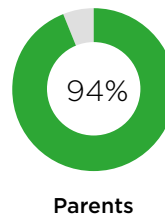
Percent of consumers that experienced unwanted consequences due to oral health issues



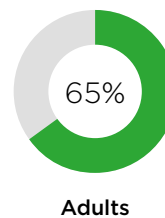
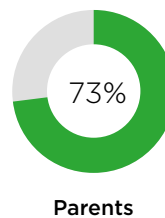
■ Adults ■ Parents
■ Employed adults ■ Employed parents

Parents are particularly worried about how oral health issues might affect their children. Three in 4 (77%) are concerned that such issues will have a negative impact on their child's overall confidence. One in 4 (22%) parents of children ages 3-17 see the disruption to their child's education, **reporting that their child had to miss an average of 4.5 days of school in the last 12 months because of oral health issues.**

Despite their oral health issues across the past year, the pandemic has positively influenced the attention Americans are paying to their health and wellness:



throughout the pandemic, believe maintaining their oral health is essential to protecting their child's/their overall health

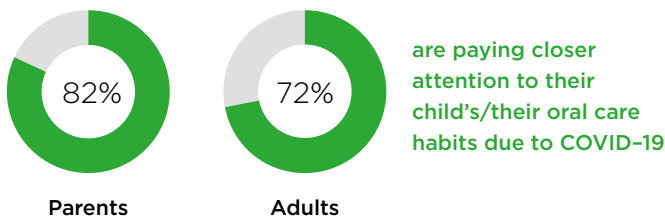


report oral health has become more of a priority as a result of the pandemic






Americans are practicing proper oral care habits at home

A key factor in achieving optimal oral health is ensuring that teeth and mouths are being looked after regularly, and the pandemic is shining a light on what Americans can be doing to improve their oral health at home:

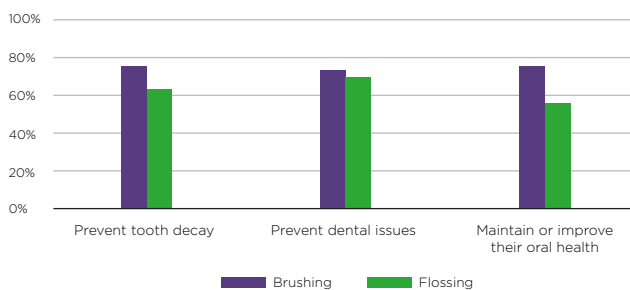


Americans continue to do their part to practice proper oral health habits at home, following recommended guidelines. In 2020, on average, children and adults:

-  Brushed their teeth twice a day
-  Flossed once a day
-  Used mouthwash once a day

Such habits are motivated by the health benefits adults associate with each, with a majority of them brushing and flossing to:

Consumer motivations for brushing and flossing



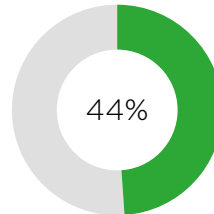
Other adults brush and floss for the cosmetic benefits they reap, such as maintaining an attractive smile (60% brushing, 43% flossing) and keeping their teeth as white as possible (62% brushing).

Beyond their brushing and flossing frequency, many follow American Dental Association guidelines on how often to replace their toothbrush. In fact, 2 in 3 adults (65%) switch out their brush at least once every three months, while 86 percent of parents do this for their child at least once a month. **Similarly, parents acknowledge fluoride as an important step in dental hygiene. About 4 in 5 (83%) moms and dads believe fluoride is very – if not extremely – important to their child’s oral health.**

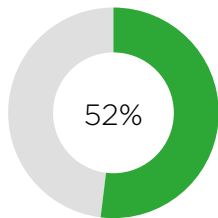


Americans are practicing proper oral care habits at home

Moreover, 3 in 4 parents recognize that their child's oral health could be better, and many of them believe poor oral health practices, like not brushing enough (45%) and not flossing enough (41%), are areas of improvement for their child's oral health. But getting their child to get on board with better oral care behaviors is a challenge. About 7 in 10 (72%) moms and dads find it difficult to get their child to brush their teeth because:



think their child simply finds it boring



believe brushing their child's teeth takes time away from things their child would rather be doing



1 in 3 (31%) believe their child doesn't like the taste of toothpaste



Parents and caregivers can help maintain children's dental health at home. Here are a few key things to focus on: Provide kids with a balanced diet, limit foods high in sugar. Help kids drink plenty of water. Brush your child's teeth with a soft-bristled toothbrush and a pea-sized drop of fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Help children floss at least once a day. Have your child wear a mouthguard when participating in sports.



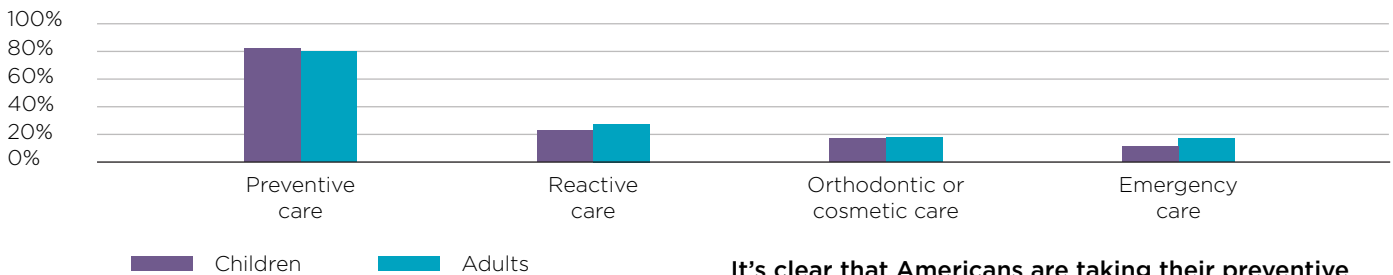
— Ron Inge
DDS, Chief Dental Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and Vice President of Professional Services, Delta Dental of Missouri



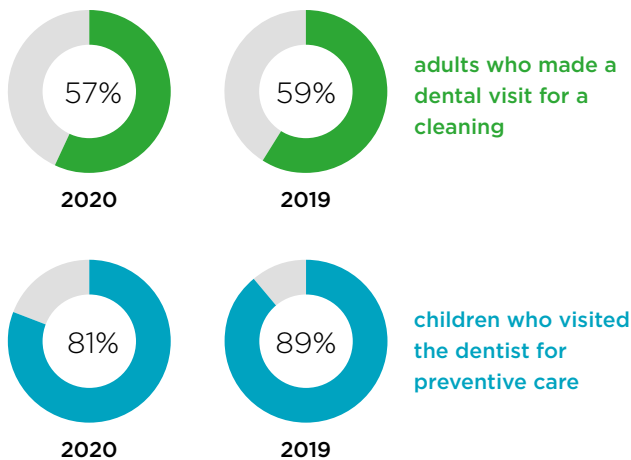
Americans are prioritizing preventive visits to the dentist

In addition to prioritizing their oral care habits at home, Americans are also doing their best to visit the dentist regularly. A majority of children (88%) and adults (74%) saw their dentist in 2020 despite obstacles brought on by the pandemic. Across 2020, adults and children sought:

Type of oral healthcare sought by consumers in 2020



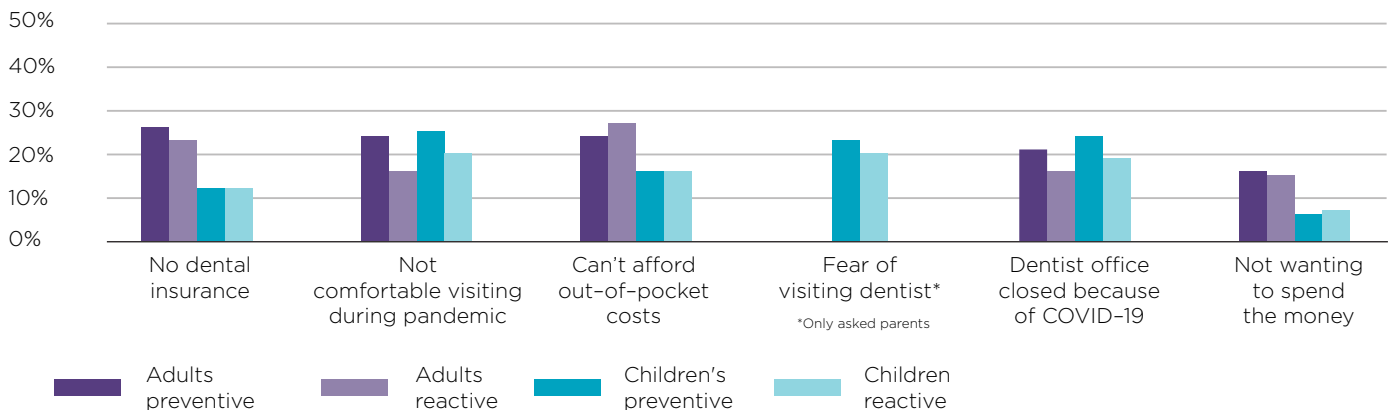
In fact, despite the barriers presented by COVID-19, their dental visit behaviors in 2020 follow a similar trend line as their behaviors in 2019:



It's clear that Americans are taking their preventive dental care seriously. Among those adults who saw their dentist for a preventive visit in 2020, they averaged two cleanings across the 12 months. And many went for all the right reasons. About 2 in 3 (64%) adults made a preventive visit in 2020 to reduce their chances of experiencing serious dental issues. Others did it because they know their oral health is connected to their overall health (52%) or because they wanted to take full advantage of their dental insurance, which covers at least one annual visit and cleaning (51%).

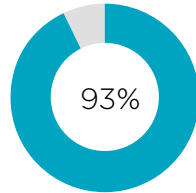
Adults and parents faced many barriers to visiting the dentist, ranging from financial to emotional, such as their child's fear of visiting the dentist. And this year, Americans faced even more obstacles due to the pandemic. Top barriers included:

Types of barriers to oral healthcare that consumers faced in 2020

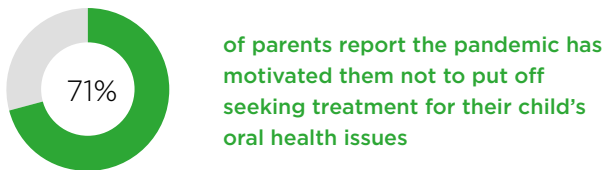


Dental insurance promotes optimal oral health

Despite the barriers standing in their way, Americans report that they plan to prioritize dental visits in 2021:



Nearly all (93%) adults plan on making a dentist visit



Currently, 3 in 5 — or 125 million — American adults have dental insurance. Similarly, 4 in 5 (81%) parents report their child is covered. **Americans recognize the importance of their insurance in helping them achieve optimal oral health.**



As more Americans recognize the importance of dental insurance in maintaining optimal oral health, Delta Dental is increasing its focus on patient-centered care. With a better understanding of the patient experience, Delta Dental can expand the role of oral health in overall health, improve its products and services to serve our customers' individual needs, and address inequities in access to oral healthcare.



— Joseph Dill
DDS, MBA, Vice President of Dental Science,
Delta Dental Plans Association

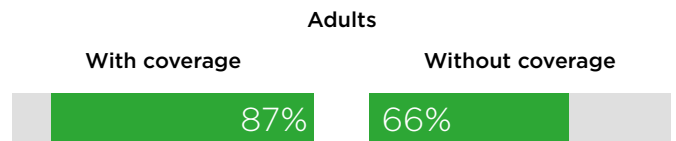
Nearly all adults with insurance believe having coverage allows them to have good oral health (96%) and encourages better oral health habits (93%).

Notably, during times of uncertainty, the benefits of dental insurance are perhaps more important than ever. Eighty-four percent of those currently insured agree that having coverage gave them peace of mind during the pandemic. **Eight in 10 (83%) parents and 7 in 10 (71%) adults appreciate their dental insurance even more amid COVID-19 than they previously had.**

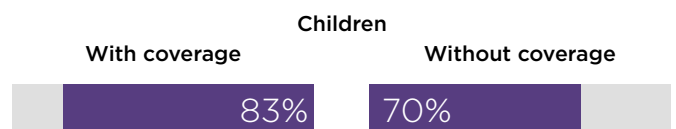
Dental insurance is also critical in helping adults and children seek preventive oral healthcare. Nine in 10 adults (92%) report that having coverage gives them a reason to visit the dentist at least once a year.

Additionally, among adults and children who visited the dentist in 2020, those with insurance are significantly more likely to have sought preventive care than those without coverage:

Percent of adults who visited the dentist in 2020



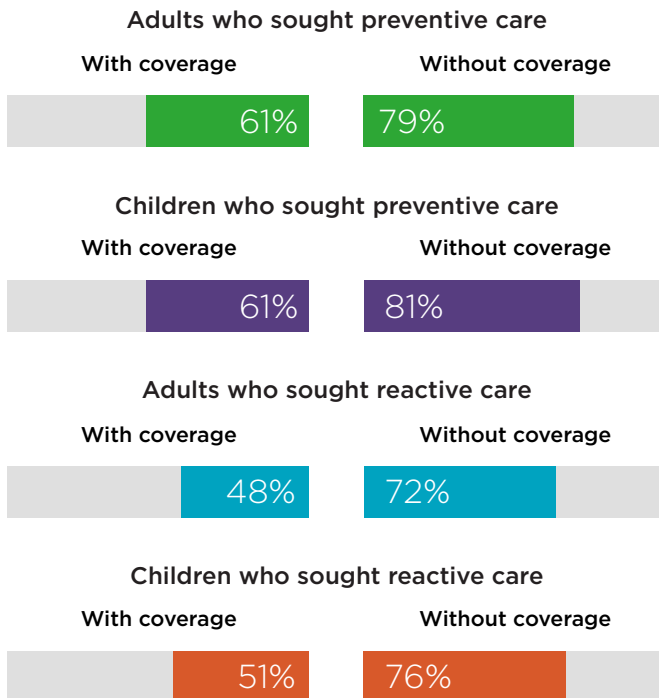
Percent of children who visited the dentist in 2020



Dental insurance promotes optimal oral health

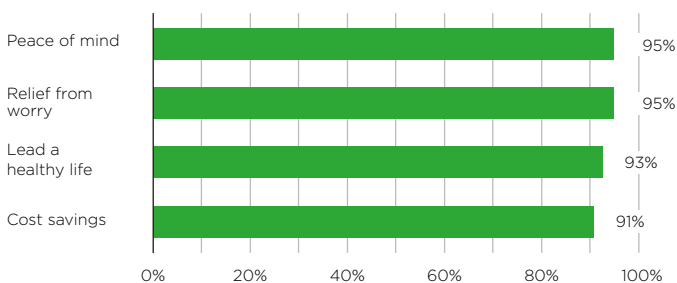
Insured adults and children are less likely than their peers without insurance to have **faced a barrier in getting preventive and reactive care.**

Percent of consumers that experienced a barrier in getting dental care



Furthermore, 9 in 10 American adults who have dental insurance recognize the benefits — both emotional and financial that come with having coverage, including:

Percent of consumers that experience emotional and financial benefits of insurance coverage



However, dental insurance remains out of reach for nearly 99 million (40%) American adults, with the cost being a key barrier. Many admit they cannot afford the monthly premium payment (34%) or pay additional out-of-pocket costs (29%). Fortunately, 2 in 5 (41%) of them think they probably — if not definitely — will secure dental insurance in 2021. And 3 in 4 (76%) parents with a child not currently covered by dental insurance report that they will do the same this year. Their motivation to seek out coverage is in part due to COVID-19. **Four in 5 (79%) parents with uninsured children and about 1 in 2 (47%) uninsured adults admit the pandemic has motivated them to seek out dental insurance.**



About the research

Delta Dental Plans Association commissioned a third-party firm, Kelton Global, a Material Company, to undertake research that formed the basis of this report. Kelton Global conducted its research from December 28, 2020 to January 8, 2021 using email invitation and online surveys to two audiences:

- The Children's Oral Health Survey was fielded among 1,071 parents of children ages 12 and under
- The Adult's Oral Health Survey was fielded among 1,067 nationally representative Americans ages 18+

About Delta Dental Plans Association

Based in Oak Brook, Illinois, the Delta Dental Plans Association is the not-for-profit national association of the 39 independent Delta Dental companies. As the nation's leading provider of dental insurance, Delta Dental's core purpose is the advancement of the oral health of our customers, partners and consumers through dental insurance and the philanthropic efforts of Delta Dental companies.

Delta Dental is the largest dental insurance provider, covering more than 80 million Americans and offering the country's largest dental network with approximately 156,000 participating dentists.

Delta Dental companies have committed to providing \$1.1 billion in COVID-19 relief by early 2021, consisting of support for customers, providers, and communities.

In 2019, Delta Dental companies provided \$76 million in direct and in-kind community outreach support to improve the oral health of adults, children, and infants in local communities across the country.



The nation's leading dental insurance provider

We make it easy to protect your smile and keep it healthy, with the largest network of dentists nationwide, quick answers and personalized service.

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