

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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'Land of Smiles' helps Illinois students brush up on dental health *~Survey shows Illinois children's oral health habits need improvement~*

Naperville, Ill. — Jan. 2013 — Illinois children need to improve their brushing and flossing habits, as well as visit the dentist more often, according to a survey¹ by Delta Dental of Illinois. As a way to educate Illinois pre-kindergarten through third-grade students about these important oral health habits, the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation's "Land of Smiles" program is travelling to more than 120 elementary schools throughout Illinois. During the program, provided free to Illinois schools by the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation, Tooth Wizard will battle his arch-enemy PlaqueMan for the health of kids' smiles. Students will learn the proper techniques for taking care of their oral health and why good oral health is so important.

Although tooth decay is nearly 100 percent preventable, it is the most common chronic disease affecting children in Illinois.² According to the *2008-2009 Healthy Smile Healthy Growth* assessment conducted by the Illinois Department of Public Health, 53 percent of Illinois third graders have experienced dental cavities. Among those children, 29 percent have untreated cavities and 5 percent have cavities that need urgent dental treatment.

"If we can help children understand the importance of good oral health and how to take care of their teeth at an early age, the benefits will last a lifetime," says Lora Vitek, director of philanthropy & community relations for the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. "'Land of Smiles' is a fun way to get kids excited about dental care and helps further our mission to improve the oral health of people in Illinois."

As part of the educational program, students will help Tooth Wizard teach the proper way to brush and floss on an oversized mouth with a giant toothbrush. While PlaqueMan tries to disrupt the kids' healthy habits, Tooth Wizard will educate them about tooth-friendly foods and the importance of visiting the dentist twice a year.

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation will give kids who attend the program a goody bag with oral health supplies, and each participating school will receive a curriculum kit to help reinforce good oral health habits with its students. Here are some of the oral health habits that fall short of what's recommended by Delta Dental of Illinois and Tooth Wizard, according to the dental benefit company's survey of 151 Illinois caregivers:

- Only 56 percent of Illinois children's teeth are brushed twice a day and 30 percent are brushed for less than two minutes. Children's teeth should be brushed twice a day for at least two minutes each time.
- Forty-four percent of respondents with children who have teeth report the teeth are never flossed and of children whose teeth are flossed, only 19 percent are flossed daily. Once any two teeth are touching, caregivers should help children floss once a day.

- Only 62 percent of Illinois children who have visited the dentist, have been twice in the past 12 months. Children should visit the dentist at least twice a year.

“We are excited about the opportunity to help educate Illinois children about these good oral health habits,” says Vitek. “But it’s extremely important that parents and caregivers are also establishing and reinforcing these same habits at home.”

This year, nearly 30,000 pre-kindergarten through third-grade students in more than 100 Illinois elementary schools will enjoy the “Land of Smiles” program. The program has reached nearly 180,000 students at more than 600 Illinois schools over the past six years.

About Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation (DDILF) was formed in March 2008 by Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL), a not-for-profit dental service corporation with a mission to improve the oral health of the communities it serves. DDILF is the charitable arm of DDIL and works to support and improve the oral health of people in Illinois. In the past decade, combined efforts of DDIL and DDILF have provided more than \$2 million to programs and organizations that provide oral health education and expand access to oral health care for Illinois residents. DDIL provides dental benefit programs to individuals and more than 5,000 employee groups throughout Illinois and covers 2 million employees and family members nationwide. DDIL and DDILF are based in Naperville, Illinois.

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¹*Morpace Inc. conducted the 2013 Delta Dental of Illinois Children’s Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted by email statewide with 151 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of Illinois adults, the margin of error is ±8 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*

²*Surgeon General’s Report on Oral Health in America, 2000.*