



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Dental anxiety may be passed on to children *Nearly 30 percent of kids are afraid to visit the dentist*

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (April 20, 2013) — Parents who are afraid to visit the dentist may pass the same fear on to their children, possibly keeping them from getting routine dental check-ups that are important to promote healthy teeth and a lifetime of good oral health habits.

That's one of the key findings from a survey of children's oral health¹ conducted on behalf of Delta Dental, a leading dental benefits provider. On average, the survey found that nearly 30 percent of children are afraid to visit the dentist. But when their parents also fear the dentist that number jumped to almost 40 percent. Conversely, just 24 percent of children whose parents are unafraid of the dentist were still fearful of dental visits themselves.

"Parents who fear visiting the dentist should try to keep those feelings to themselves to avoid passing them on to children," said Dr. Katina Spadoni, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. "It's important that the parent or caregiver responsible for taking children to the dentist remains relaxed and calm."

The top reason Illinois parents say their children are afraid to visit the dentist is due to the drills and dental equipment (18 percent). Other explanations include being afraid of having work done (13 percent), a bad past experience (9 percent) and shots and needles (8 percent).²

During National Mental Health Month, Delta Dental of Illinois offers parents and caregivers three simple tips to help children feel more comfortable in the dentist's chair:

- **Start young:** It's recommended that children visit the dentist within six months of getting their first tooth – and no later than their first birthday. Starting at a young age allows children and parents to establish trust with a dentist and begin a regular dental visit routine.

- **Keep it simple and positive:** If children ask questions before a visit to the dentist, avoid using words that could make them scared, such as drill, shot or filling, or counseling them that it won't hurt, since they often aren't aware it could hurt in the first place. Instead, explain that the dentist is simply going to check their smile and count their teeth. Try not to discuss any negative experience that you might have had so your child can form their own opinion through personal experience.
- **Call ahead:** Tell the dentist ahead of time that your child may be anxious about the visit. Most pediatric dental offices will have toys or music that children can focus on instead of the appointment itself, helping them relax and making a trip to the dentist a fun and enjoyable experience.

"Parents need to help children understand why visiting the dentist is so important and help make their visits as comfortable as possible," Dr. Spadoni said. "Kids who have negative experiences at the dentist may be less inclined to make regular visits as teenagers and grown adults."

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation recently launched the 2013 "Dentist By 1" campaign to educate parents about the benefits of taking their children to the dentist by age 1 and to encourage them to schedule a visit. For more information about this important oral health habit and to learn how you can help underprivileged children in Illinois, visit www.dentistby1.com.

About Delta Dental of Illinois

Delta Dental of Illinois (DDIL) is a not-for-profit dental service corporation that provides dental benefit programs to individuals and more than 5,000 employee groups throughout Illinois. DDIL covers 2 million individuals, employees and family members in these groups nationwide. DDIL is based in Naperville, Illinois and offers single-site administration and client services.

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¹ Morpace Inc. conducted the 2013 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted nationally via the Internet with 926 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.

² Morpace Inc. conducted the 2013 Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted statewide via the Internet with 151 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.