



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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November is Diabetes Awareness Month

Regular dental exams could be the first line of defense against diabetes

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (November 10, 2017) – While more than a million Illinoisans have been diagnosed with diabetes, an additional 350,000 have the disease but are unaware. Yet a regular dental exam could be all that’s needed to provide a clue, according to a dental expert from Delta Dental of Illinois.

“Oral health and overall health are connected. Diabetes can increase the risk for gum disease, and gum disease can actually influence prediabetes and contribute to the progression of diabetes,” said Dr. Sheila Strock, vice president, dental services and science officer at Delta Dental of Illinois. “Since people are likely to visit their dentist more regularly than their physician, the dentist can be the first line of defense in detecting gum disease and, possibly, diabetes.”

People with diabetes are more likely to experience conditions associated with gum disease at an earlier age than non-diabetics. According to the 2017 Delta Dental of Illinois Adult Oral Health & Well-Being Survey, nearly 1 in 5 Illinois adults have gum disease. Since diabetes is often painless, Dr. Strock cautions Illinoisans to be mindful of signs of gum disease, which can include bad breath; bleeding gums after brushing or flossing; red, swollen or tender gums; or changes in the way your teeth fit when you bite.

During Diabetes Awareness Month this November, Delta Dental of Illinois wants to remind Illinoisans that there are many reasons to keep regular dental checkups on your calendar, even if you take good care of your teeth.

- Along with thoroughly cleaning your teeth during a regular preventive checkup, your dentist can perform an exam that includes checking your teeth for cavities, evaluating the condition of your

gums and screening for oral cancer and other health issues that can be difficult to spot on your own. Identifying oral health issues early on can reduce potential discomfort and financial costs.

- It is important to understand that more than 120 diseases can cause specific signs and symptoms in and around the mouth and jaw.¹ Therefore, your dentist will talk with you about your overall health and ask you to complete a health history that may provide clues to diabetes. For example, are you thirsty most of the time? If you do have gum disease and other risk factors for diabetes, your dentist may recommend you see your physician to be tested. In the meantime, he or she will work with you to control the gum disease.
- In addition, upon learning of any other medical conditions or treatments you're receiving, your dentist can make recommendations to help you proactively counter any potentially negative side effects the conditions and treatments may have on your oral health.

"People with existing oral health problems, such as gum disease, may need to see their dentist more often. If caught early, gum disease is easier to manage and, in very early stages, can be reversed," said Dr. Strock. "Daily brushing and flossing and regular dental checkups are essential for everyone but are also the best defense against the oral complications of diabetes. Since diabetes limits the body's natural ability to fight infection, good oral health habits are especially important to help keep the disease in check."

For more tips to improve your oral health and overall health, visit Delta Dental of Illinois' oral health resource at YourOralHealthHub.com.

About Delta Dental of Illinois

Delta Dental of Illinois is a not-for-profit dental service corporation that provides dental benefit programs to individuals and more than 6,000 employee groups throughout Illinois. Delta Dental of Illinois covers 2 million individuals, employees and family members nationwide. Delta Dental of Illinois is based in Naperville, Illinois and offers single-site administration and client services.

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¹Steven L. Bricker, Robert P. Langlais, and Craig S. Miller, *Oral Diagnosis, Oral Medicine and Treatment Planning* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1994).