



## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

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#### **National Smile Month: Keep Kids' Teeth Cavity-Free**

*Delta Dental of Illinois fills in some oral health parenting knowledge gaps*

**NAPERVILLE, Ill. (June 10, 2013)** – June is National Smile Month, and an important time to brush up on how to keep kids' smiles cavity-free. While most parents know that brushing and flossing play an important role, it's what they don't know that may jeopardize their children's oral health.

Visiting the dentist early is a prime example. Sixty percent of Illinois children had not seen a dentist before age 3, according to the 2013 Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey.<sup>1</sup> What many parents don't realize is the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that a child go to the dentist by age 1 or within six months after their first tooth comes in.<sup>2</sup>

"Parents should take children to the dentist by age 1 to establish a trusting relationship with the dentist and receive critical oral health care advice," said Dr. Katina Spadoni, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. "Not only does it set a foundation for good oral health and habits, but also any problems can be detected and addressed before they turn into serious issues with considerable economic and health costs." In fact, studies show that early preventive dental care can save in future dental treatment costs.

In addition to taking children to the dentist by age 1, there are other key tips parents and caregivers can follow to help keep their children's teeth healthy.

#### **Fill bottles with water, not juice or milk**

Nearly 60 percent of Illinois caregivers with a child 4 years old or younger report that the child sometimes takes a nap or goes to bed with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice. This bad habit can lead to early childhood (baby bottle) tooth decay.

Ideally, children should finish a bottle before their teeth are brushed and they are put to bed. But if they must have a bottle or sippy cup while they go to sleep, fill it with water. Parents should not get in the habit of providing sweet drinks because they think it will please their child. Babies and toddlers want the soothing, repetitive action of sucking on a bottle more than sweetened drinks.

### **Avoid sharing food and utensils with children**

Many caregivers don't know that they can actually pass harmful bacteria from their mouth to their child's mouth, which can put the child at an increased risk for cavities. Bacteria are passed when items contaminated with saliva go into a child's mouth. Typically, this takes place through natural, parental behaviors, such as sharing eating utensils or cleaning off your baby's pacifier with your mouth.

More than 70 percent of Illinois caregivers say they share utensils such as a spoon, fork or glass with a child. Caregivers of children ages 2 to 3 are most likely to share utensils with their children.

"Babies are actually born without any harmful bacteria in their mouth. But once the teeth start to come in, decay-causing bacteria can colonize in the mouth, and children become more prone to cavities in baby and permanent teeth," Dr. Spadoni said. "Parents with a history of poor oral health are particularly likely to pass germs along."

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation launched the "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 [dentistby1.com](http://dentistby1.com).

For additional tips to help keep children's teeth healthy during National Smile Month and all year long, visit [mouthmattersil.com](http://mouthmattersil.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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<sup>1</sup> *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.*

<sup>2</sup> *American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry – Policy on the Dental Home.*  
[http://www.aapd.org/media/Polices\\_Guidelines/P\\_DentalHome.pdf](http://www.aapd.org/media/Polices_Guidelines/P_DentalHome.pdf)