



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation
111 Shuman Boulevard
Naperville, IL 60563

Contact:

Liz Jans
Meyocks
Phone: 319-321-5695
lizjans@meyocks.com

Additional Media Contact:

Lyndsay Bradshaw
Delta Dental of Illinois
630-718-4753
lbradshaw@deltadentalil.com

Illinois students get an oral health lesson from Tooth Wizard

NAPERVILLE, Ill. — Sept. 13, 2017 – This fall, Illinois pre-kindergarten through third-grade students will learn invaluable oral health lessons from Tooth Wizard and PlaqueMan through the Land of Smiles program. Provided by Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation, the educational program teaches good oral health habits to help battle tooth decay and prevent dental-related school absences.

Although largely preventable, more than half of Illinois third-graders have had at least one cavity¹ and 22 percent have untreated tooth decay.² As the school year kicks off, it's likely many Illinois children will miss school because of oral health issues. According to the 2017 Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey, nearly half of Illinois kids ages 6 to 12 have missed school due to dental problems in the past 12 months.³

Students will begin their oral health journey by helping heroic Tooth Wizard defeat his evil nemesis PlaqueMan by learning the habits needed to have healthy smiles. Children will get involved in the fun during the interactive performance, helping demonstrate how to correctly brush, floss and use fluoride rinse causing PlaqueMan to scurry off the stage in defeat.

The Land of Smiles program seeks to combat poor oral health. A state oral health assessment report, *Oral Health in Illinois*, released in 2016 and sponsored by the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation and others, found that poor oral health is one of the most pressing, unmet health care issues facing Illinois children, particularly for those living in poverty and rural areas.

In fact, the report found that one third of Illinois children in rural areas have untreated tooth decay. Illinois children living in poverty are five times more likely to have fair or poor oral health. And only 55 percent of children on Medicaid saw a dentist in the past year.²

"While many children are not getting the dental care they need, they are also not receiving oral health education. Education is key to a lifetime of good oral health and overall health," said Lora Vitek, director of philanthropy and community relations for Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation. "Our Land of Smiles program teaches children

important oral health lessons at a young age so they can establish a foundation for healthy smiles and bodies, allowing them to focus and flourish at school and beyond.”

The free Land of Smiles program not only emphasizes good oral hygiene techniques, but also teaches children the importance of eating tooth-friendly foods, visiting the dentist twice a year and having sealants applied.

Tooth Wizard offers Illinois parents the following tips to help reinforce the same good oral health habits at home:

- Children’s teeth should be brushed twice a day for at least two minutes each time.
- Once any two teeth are touching, children’s teeth should be flossed once a day.
- Limit sugary and starchy foods but if consumed, have them during mealtimes when more saliva is produced to wash away bacteria from teeth.
- By age 1 or six months after the first tooth comes in, children should visit the dentist regularly.
- Parents should discuss placing sealants on their child’s teeth with their dentist. Typically, sealants are placed on six-year and 12-year molars to help protect them from tooth decay.

In addition to the oral health lesson, children who participate in Land of Smiles will receive an oral health kit with a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and a booklet packed with oral health tips. Schools will also receive a curriculum kit to help educators reinforce good oral health habits with students throughout the year.

“By asking students about their oral health knowledge before and after the program, we know that Land of Smiles has a measurable impact. We think the program really resonates with kids because it makes learning about oral health fun,” said Vitek. “By the end of the program, children are literally chanting ‘brush, brush, brush’ to help Tooth Wizard defeat PlaqueMan.”

This fall, the Land of Smiles program will reach about 18,000 pre-kindergarten through third-grade students in more than 80 Illinois elementary schools throughout the state. The program has reached over 300,000 students at more than 750 Illinois schools in the past nine years.

For those interested in requesting a Land of Smiles appearance at their school, visit landofsmilesil.org. For questions about Land of Smiles, please contact Lora Vitek at 630-718-4764 or lvitek@deltadentalil.com.

About Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation

The Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation was formed in March 2008 by Delta Dental of Illinois, a not-for-profit dental service corporation with a mission to improve the oral health of the communities it serves. Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation is the 501(c)(3) charitable arm of Delta Dental of Illinois and works to support and improve the oral health of people in Illinois. In the past decade, combined efforts of Delta Dental of Illinois and Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation have provided more than \$3 million to programs and organizations in Illinois that improve the oral health of the residents of Illinois.

-###-

¹Oral Health Forum, *Healthy Smile Healthy Growth Assessment*, 2013-2014.

²Oral Health in Illinois Report, 2016.

³Kelton, a leading global insights firm, conducted the 2017 Delta Dental of Illinois Children’s Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted statewide via email with 155 Illinois parents of children ages 12 and under. For results based on the total sample of Illinois adults, the margin of error is +/- 7.9% at a 95 percent confidence level.