



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Delta Dental of Iowa
9000 Northpark Drive
Johnston, IA 50131

Contact:
Jill Hamilton
Corporate Communications Manager
515-261-5526
jhamilton@deltadentalia.com

Like a cold, parents can pass decay-causing bacteria to children

Delta Dental provides tips to protect children's teeth from harmful bacteria

JOHNSTON, Iowa (November 7, 2011) – Most parents don't know they can pass harmful bacteria from their mouth to their baby's mouth, which can put their child at an increased risk for cavities.

In fact, less than a third of Iowa parents (29 percent) realize they can pass dental disease to their baby. That's one of the key findings from a survey¹ of Iowa children's oral health, conducted on behalf of Delta Dental of Iowa, the state's leading dental benefits provider.

The truth is, much like a cold, the bacteria in the mouth that causes tooth decay can be transferred from person to person. 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 using one's mouth to clean a baby's pacifier. Research shows that moms – more often than dads or others – usually inadvertently infect their children.²

Caregiver behavior reflects a lack of knowledge about passing on bacteria that can lead to dental disease. Thirty percent of Iowans say they sometimes or often share utensils with their children. 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 mouths. But once bacteria are introduced in the mouth, your child will be more prone to cavities in baby and permanent teeth,” said Dr. Ed Schooley, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Iowa. “If a parent has a history of poor oral health with frequent cavities, they are particularly likely to pass the germs along.”

Delta Dental offers these tips to help caregivers protect their children's teeth:

- Make sure to keep your own mouth healthy. It's never too late to begin good oral health habits. Maintain a good diet, brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day and floss at least once a day. Visit the dentist regularly and have any cavities in your own teeth repaired.
 - Try to cut back on or eliminate saliva-transferring behaviors – such as sharing utensils and
-

toothbrushes, and cleaning off your baby's pacifier with your own mouth.

- Mothers and expecting moms who already chew gum should chew gum sweetened primarily with xylitol. A recent study found that children of moms who chewed xylitol gum (starting in the sixth month of pregnancy) were significantly less likely to have decay-causing bacteria in their saliva.³

If you follow these tips, you can ensure that you will be passing along good oral health habits – not harmful bacteria – to your children. Visit www.OralHealthIA.com to learn more about good oral health care.

Delta Dental of Iowa is the largest and most experienced provider of dental benefits in the state. As a not-for-profit, Delta Dental of Iowa invests in oral health projects through the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation that focus on access to care, prevention, education and research. Delta Dental of Iowa is a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, a national organization of not-for-profit Delta Dental member companies. The national association is the largest dental benefits carrier in the nation providing coverage to 56 million people in more than 95,700 employer groups.

###

¹ Morpace Inc. conducted the 2011 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted by email statewide with 150 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of Iowa adults, the margin of error is ± 8 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

² Australian Dental Journal, Factors influencing oral colonization of mutans streptococci in young children, 2007.

³ Journal of Dental Research, Xylitol Gum and Maternal Transmission of Mutans Streptococci, January 2010.