

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT

Troy Bergstrom
(651) 994-5210

Delta Dental Plan Of Minnesota Tackles Tooth Decay During Mall's "Toddler Tuesday"

Berenstain Bear Appearance, Puppet Show Accompany Free Dental Screenings In Conjunction With Children's Dental Health Month

(EAGAN, MINN.) Feb. 17, 2005 – Tooth decay is still one of *the most preventable* childhood diseases, yet remains one of the most prevalent unmet healthcare needs of Minnesota children. In an effort to combat children's oral health disease, Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota is teaming with Children's Dental Services to offer free dental screenings on Tuesday, February 22 at the Mall of America.

"Children's Dental Health Month is a wonderful opportunity to instill good oral health habits in our young children," said Dr. Richard Hastreiter, Dental Director for Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota. "Using effective brushing and flossing techniques and eating a healthy diet are essential habits to develop as early in life as possible. The importance of maintaining clean teeth cannot be over-emphasized."

The screenings, part of the Mall of America's Toddler Tuesday's program, will run from 10 a.m. to noon and will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Nearly 300 children are expected to attend the event, which will also feature an appearance by the Berenstain Bears and a puppet show presented by PACER (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights).

"We are pleased to partner with Children's Dental Services in an effort to improve the oral health of Minnesota children," said Michael F. Walsh, president and CEO of Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota. "Maintaining good oral health has a positive impact on a child's overall health, and it's never too early to begin proper oral healthcare. Children's Dental Health Month is a great time to remind everyone that the most effective way to avoid dental problems is through preventative care."

- More -

Dental Screenings, page two

Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota, a sponsor of the Mall's year-long Toddler Tuesday program, also supported additional activities during February in conjunction with Children's Dental Health Month. Free dental screenings were also offered at the Mall on February 8, and during the Kids Expo Feb. 19-20 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

In addition, Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota and the Minnesota Head Start Association recently announced their collaboration to create "The Tooth Book," a guide published in four languages (English, Spanish, Somali, Hmong) to educate Minnesota Head Start parents on how to take care of their child's teeth from birth to kindergarten and beyond. The Tooth Book was funded through a \$150,000 grant from Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota and will reach nearly 115,000 youth statewide, educating Minnesota parents on how to take care of their child's teeth from birth to kindergarten and beyond.

Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota is also supporting Twin Cities Public Television and its Ready to Learn outreach service, which engages children in learning healthy oral health habits and establishes the groundwork for a healthy future.

CDS is a nonprofit corporation that provides dental care for children whose families cannot pay for dental care, and for children with insurance. CDS provides dental care to more than 10,000 children per year, and screening and follow-up to more than 11,000 school age children. In addition to providing high-quality dental service at 12 locations in the Twin Cities Metro area, CDS hosts an internship program, an oral health screening program, and various outreach programs.

Observation of children's dental health began as a one-day event in 1941. In 1981, the event was extended to a month-long celebration, known today as National Children's Dental Health Month. For more oral health tips, check out the Delta Dental Web site at www.deltadentalmn.org.

An innovator in oral health benefit plans, Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota is an independently operated, nonprofit dental services company that administers self-insured and prepaid dental service plans. Delta Dental serves more than 8,600 employer groups with more than 2.8 million members in Minnesota and across the nation. Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota is headquartered in Eagan, and has a customer service center on Minnesota's Iron Range. For more information, visit our Web site at www.deltadentalmn.org.

###

Children's Oral Health Statistics

Dental decay is one of the most common chronic infectious diseases among U.S. children. Oral health experts agree that creating healthy smiles begins in infancy. In shaping the overall oral health of children, we first need to shape the discussion with parents, teaching parents the simple steps they can take to assist in the care of their children's teeth.

Key Statistics

- An estimated 98 percent of all young people have some degree of gum inflammation.¹
- Approximately 25 percent of children living in poverty enter kindergarten without ever having seen a dentist.
- Tooth decay is still one of *the most preventable* childhood diseases, yet in the U.S. dental care remains the prevalent unmet health care need for children.¹ It occurs five times more often than asthma and seven times more often than hay fever.
- 17% of children aged 2-4 years have already had decay. By the age of 8, approximately 52% of children have experienced decay, and by the age of 17, dental decay affects 78% of children.¹
- Among low-income children, almost 50% of tooth decay remains untreated, and may result in pain, dysfunction, underweight, and poor appearance — problems that can greatly reduce a child's capacity to succeed in the educational environment.¹
- Young children with significant dental problems are typically distracted by their pain and are often unable to focus on learning.²
- The Surgeon General reports that America's children miss an estimated 51 million school hours annually because of dental issues.³
- Studies demonstrate that children with health/dental insurance are more likely to receive preventive and primary care than are uninsured children.⁴
- While the prevalence of tooth decay has decreased, it still affects more than half of all children by second grade.⁵
- 80% of the cavities occur in only 25% of children, mainly among low-income and minority children.⁵

Strategies to improve children's oral health

- Effective oral health strategies include:
 - ☑ Community water fluoridation
 - ☑ Daily brushing with a fluoride-containing tooth paste and flossing
 - ☑ Regular professional dental care
 - ☑ Dental sealants, if needed
 - ☑ Oral health educational programs in schools and communities
 - ☑ Healthy eating habits
 - ☑ Using protective gear to prevent oral-facial sports injuries, and
 - ☑ Put children to bed with only water in baby bottles.

Sources:

- (1) Center for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/topics/child.htm>
- (2) Maternal and Child Health Oral Health Resource Center. 2001. *Oral health and learning: When children's oral health suffers, so does their ability to learn*. National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health. Georgetown University.
- (3) USDHHS. 2000. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research.
- (4) Healthy Minnesotans Public Health Improvement Goal #13, p 62. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/phg/pdf/download.html>.
- (5) Connect for Kids: http://www.connectforkids.org/resources3139/resources_show.htm?attrib_id=5081&doc_id=29586&parent=82345