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Proper Oral Health Habits Can Keep Minnesota Seniors Smiling

Periodontal Disease, Tooth Decay More Prevalent Later in Life

(EAGAN, MINN.) Oct. 31, 2005— Proper dental care is a lifetime commitment, however, Minnesota seniors face a range of special oral health concerns, including tooth decay and periodontal disease. These conditions may become more prevalent as people age – meaning dental care becomes more important at a time many Minnesota seniors have no dental coverage.

According to Oral Health in America: a report of the Surgeon General (2000), people 55 to 74 years of age have higher rates of periodontal disease and also have an increasing amount of tooth decay compared to younger adults. As seniors leave the workforce, dental benefits are often left behind as well.

The resulting lack of access to affordable dental care can lead to a reduction in dental visits, advanced dental conditions and more expensive dental procedures, with seniors footing a substantial bill.

“The aging process may lead to subtle, and sometimes dramatic, changes in the condition of teeth, mouth and gums. This makes regular dental visits crucial to our aging population,” said Dr. Richard Hastreiter, Dental Director and Vice President of Oral Health Analytics at Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota. “Brushing with a fluoride toothpaste, flossing, orally healthy nutrition and regular dental visits can keep you smiling well into retirement and contribute to your overall health and well being.”

Knowing what to expect and how to deal with these changes can make all the difference in your oral health and lifestyle. Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota provides the following advice to seniors regarding oral health care:

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- Be aware that poor diet, poor oral hygiene, medical diseases, some medications and treatments, and ill-fitting dentures or bridges can increase the chances for tooth decay and gum disease.
- Fluoride is just as important in preventing cavities in adults as in children. Use fluoride toothpaste and drink plenty of fluoridated water.
- For dry mouth, your dentist might recommend sugar-free candy or gum to stimulate saliva flow. Artificial saliva or oral rinses may also be appropriate.
- See your dentist at the first signs of trouble: pain, tenderness or numbness; gums that are red or swollen, tender or bleed easily; a swelling, lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small-eroded area anywhere in or about the mouth or neck; white or red patches in the mouth or on the lips; a sore that bleeds easily or does not heal; a change in the way your teeth fit together; difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue
- Tell your dentist about any other health problems and medications you are taking to assure the most appropriate dental treatments.
- Ask your dentist for tips if you have trouble holding a toothbrush or floss. Widening the handle of the toothbrush with a sponge or adhesive tape may help. Some like to use an electric toothbrush or commercial floss holder.

Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota offers affordable coverage to Minnesotans age 50 and over through its SingularDental plans (www.deltadentalmn.org). SingularDental plans are available for as little as \$20.27 a month and cover diagnostic, preventive, basic and major dental care. The plans also allow for dependent coverage.

“Proper dental care is important as we age, and unfortunately many Minnesotans in the 50 and over age group have limited access to affordable oral health care,” said Sheila Riggs, president and CEO of Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota. “We wanted to give Minnesotans in this age group an affordable and straightforward solution. We’re offering this product in response to what clearly is a pressing need in Minnesota.”

Enrolling for the plans has been made easy, with no pre-screening. The company has a limited open enrollment window, which will begin on November 1 and close on December 31, 2005. To receive an enrollment kit for SingularDental, please call 651-406-5959 or toll-free at 800-704-6993 during normal business hours. The enrollment kit also is available online 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 3.3 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.