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Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota Considering Additional Dental Coverage for Expectant Mothers, Pending Study Results

EAGAN, Minn. (Feb. 14, 2006) -- Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota announced today it is considering adding new types of dental coverage for expectant mothers at no additional cost, pending the outcomes of key studies on periodontal disease in pregnant women and the incidence of preterm birth funded by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) in Washington D.C.

“There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a link between an individual’s oral health and overall health, specifically in this instance an association between periodontal disease and preterm babies, but additional research is needed to determine if there is a cause and effect relationship between these two conditions” said Dr. Richard Hastreiter, dental director and vice president of oral health analytics at Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota. “The NIDCR is funding comprehensive studies on this issue, and if a causal relationship is proven, Delta Dental will be adding specific types of dental coverage at no additional cost. In this case and in similar situations, we believe it is our corporate responsibility to continually monitor the most recent scientific studies to ensure Minnesotans have access to appropriate dental benefits based on cutting edge research.”

The NIDCR funded research includes two independent studies, involving 2,600 pregnant women, to determine if treating periodontal disease in pregnant women can reduce the incidence of preterm births. Results of one of the studies is expected in 2006.

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“The NIDCR funded studies will help us determine if there is a causal relationship between periodontal disease and preterm births,” continued Hastreiter. “If these studies show that along with other strategies proactive periodontal care is effective in reducing the incidence of preterm birth, it will not only be a substantial breakthrough that benefits the baby’s health, but also be a very cost-effective approach to helping solve a problem that has significant health and financial consequences.”

Babies who are born preterm can face enormous health related challenges. According to the March of Dimes, it is estimated that approximately 12 percent of all babies born in the United States are born preterm. The cost of care to for preterm babies to U.S. businesses averages \$41,610 vs. \$2,830 for a healthy, full-term baby, amounting to several billion dollars a year, according to the March of Dimes.

Hastreiter added that aside from the issues raised in the NIDCR funded studies, pregnant women should take the following steps to maintain their oral health:

- Pregnant women, or women planning on becoming pregnant, should visit their dentist for a checkup. They should inform the dentist of the pregnancy, so the dentist is aware of their pregnancy before providing treatment, medications or x-rays.
- Pregnant women should be in tune with their oral health and contact the dentist at the first sign of trouble, such as swollen or bleeding gums.
- Pregnant women should eat a nutritious, well balanced diet, limiting foods or snacks with high sugar content. For between meal snacks, select items that are nutritious for both mom and baby, like raw fruit or vegetables. Drink water instead of soda or sugary drinks. Following the physician’s dietary advice is the best course of action during pregnancy.
- Some women experience morning sickness with nausea. Vomiting can cause tooth enamel to erode and expose the dentin underneath, causing discomfort and potential tooth decay. To neutralize this effect, immediately after vomiting

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rinse the mouth with baking soda mixed in water, or with a sugar free mouth rinse, or with plain water if nothing else is available.

- Use a fluoride toothpaste and drink fluoridated water.
- Practice good oral hygiene by brushing and flossing daily.
- Do not use tobacco products in any form.

For more information or to download our Smile Discoveriessm oral health educational tips, visit www.deltadentalmn.org.

About Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota

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.

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