



# Press Release

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, October 24, 2007

## Contact Information for Delta Dental of Minnesota

Heather Hofmeister, Senior Corporate Communications Specialist

Email: [hhofmeister@deltadentalmn.org](mailto:hhofmeister@deltadentalmn.org)

Phone: 651-994-5210 • Fax: 651-406-5975 • Cell: 612-202-9159

## **Delta Dental of Minnesota, United Way of Greater Duluth and Children's Dental Services Team Up With Duluth Public Schools to Expand School-Based Dental Program, *Smiles Across Minnesota* Dental Program Targets Duluth Head Start and Elementary School Children**

*Duluth, MN* – The Duluth Public School Board has approved the expansion of a national preventive dental program, *Smiles Across Minnesota*, into Duluth public elementary schools. The program, funded in part by Delta Dental of Minnesota, will expand care and prevent tooth decay through the promotion of oral health prevention activities to low-income and uninsured children.

The program will provide children ages 3 to 12 with preventive dental services – including cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants – right within the schools. These services will be offered to all students at participating schools and administered by Children's Dental Services. Uninsured students who are income-eligible will receive free care through the program.

"This is an efficient and effective model that will increase the accessibility of quality, preventive dental care for children," states Dr. Keith Dixon, Superintendent of the Duluth Public Schools. "We hope to serve well over 1,000 children in the first year of offering this service to our families."

Tooth decay (dental cavities or caries) is one of the most common chronic diseases in childhood. More than half of all children have caries by the second grade and 80 percent of all teens have cavities by the time they finish high school. "Preventative measures, such as education, sealants and fluoride treatments, have a long-term impact on a child's future dental health and well-being," explains Sarah Wovcha, Children's Dental Services.

"In Minnesota, 70 percent of low-income children don't receive any dental care," cites Therese Scherrer, Director of Community Impact at United Way of Greater Duluth. "This was a concern that was well documented in our recent Community Impact Report."

That's largely why United Way of Greater Duluth and Delta Dental of Minnesota stepped forward to expand this Minnesota-based children's preventive dental program to the Northland. "Bringing this program to the Duluth public schools is something we've been very committed to achieving," said Ann Johnson, Community Affairs Director at Delta Dental of Minnesota. "We are pleased to expand this successful, national school-based program to Northern Minnesota and to partner with other companies whose efforts increase oral health prevention and outreach. Companies who support this program include Oral Health America, 3M ESPE, GC America and Patterson Dental among others."

"United Way is committed to being a local partner to ensure the success of the local launch of the *Smiles Across Minnesota* program," adds Paula Reed, President, United Way of Greater Duluth. "We will work to convene the necessary partners and resources to promote the program's sustainability in our community." United Way, along with Generations Health Care Initiatives, Northland Foundation and St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services, have each stepped forward to provide financial support for *Smiles Across Minnesota – Duluth*.

United Way of Greater Duluth will host a public event in early December to raise awareness about the issue of children’s oral health and bring attention to the January launch of *Smiles Across Minnesota – Duluth*.

**Smiles Across Minnesota – Duluth** is a joint effort made possible by Delta Dental, Children’s Dental Services, United Way of Greater Duluth and the Duluth Public School District.

About **Smiles Across Minnesota** – Delta Dental of Minnesota and Children’s Dental Services launched the *Smiles Across Minnesota* (SAM) coalition in 2006, in conjunction with Oral Health America’s Smiles Across America program. *Smiles Across Minnesota* is one of the most successful coalitions of Oral Health America’s Smiles Across America program, which focuses on providing school-based dental care to low income and uninsured children.

# # #