

# Evidence-Based Dentistry

## Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program Oral health meets overall health.

### What is evidence-based dentistry?

Evidence-based dentistry links oral health and overall health. It is based on clinically relevant scientific evidence that demonstrates how individuals with specific health conditions can benefit from additional oral health care.

### What is the effective date of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program?

Our original Enhanced Benefits Program was effective September 1, 2007, and included periodontal disease, diabetes and pregnancy. We have enhanced the program to include high-risk cardiac conditions, kidney failure/undergoing dialysis, suppressed immune systems or cancer-related chemotherapy and/or radiation; these enhancements are effective July 1, 2009. For new groups, the effective date will be the effective date of the dental plan.

### Will there be other evidence-based plan design recommendations in the future?

Probably. Scientific understanding of the issues continues to grow. We will not rush to add options that are not solidly grounded in science, but we will monitor research and discussion within the dental science community and develop plan options that reflect consensus among those experts.

### Specific Questions about Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program

#### Does Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program apply to Delta Dental PPO<sup>SM</sup>, Delta Dental Premier<sup>®</sup> and DeltaCare<sup>®</sup>?

Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program applies to groups with Delta Dental PPO and Delta Dental Premier only.

#### Can a group offer just one part of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program (for example, provide additional services for people with diabetes, but not for other medical

#### conditions)?

No, the plan is available as a package.

#### How does a dentist know if his/her Delta Dental of Illinois patient has Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program?

You can check eligibility for the program through the Dentist Connection on Delta Dental of Illinois' Web site at [www.deltadentalil.com](http://www.deltadentalil.com), through our IVR at 800-323-1743 using the "Fax Back" feature or by speaking to a customer service representative.

#### Can dentists enroll patients?

Yes, through the Dentist Connection.

- Click on the "Enhanced Benefits Program" link.
- You will be able to enter or update the small amount of health information required for your Delta Dental of Illinois patient to qualify for extra benefits. The patient will be immediately eligible for those benefits.
- You may also enroll a patient by phone by calling Delta Dental of Illinois' Customer Service Department at 800-323-1743. Hours are 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Central Time.

#### If a patient has multiple conditions (e.g. diabetes and pregnancy), can I select both?

Yes. You can select multiple conditions.

#### How does Delta Dental of Illinois know the individual actually has the condition he/she indicates?

There is no incentive for an individual to falsify information using the self-enrollment feature of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program. The slight risk of an individual falsifying a health condition to gain additional Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program coverage is far outweighed by the advantages it offers over other mechanisms, such as passive enrollment based on medical claims.

To further ensure the integrity of the program, Delta Dental

will randomly audit Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program health history information provided by enrollees with health history information on file with their attending dentist.

#### What are the advantages of self-enrollment?

- People see their dentist more often than their physician. So, who better to be aware of health conditions and their relationship to dental health than the attending dentist? The dentist can make the patient and Delta Dental immediately aware of what steps are appropriate to ensure the integration of oral and overall health.
- Self-enrollment empowers the consumer. This responsibility encourages the consumer to take a more active role in the management of his/her health and to be a better-informed purchaser of health care services, and provides an opportunity for the dentist to be more engaged in that process as well.
- Self-enrollment provides a real-time, immediate interface between health conditions and dental care, bypassing the time lag inherent to medical claims submission and the subsequent interface with dental claims administration systems.

#### How does Delta Dental of Illinois know when a pregnancy term expires?

The enrollee (or her dentist) enters the due date at the time of enrollment. Our system will automatically end the eligibility for Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program benefits on that date, though claims submitted later with dates of service that fall during the pregnancy period will continue to be processed and paid.

#### Is it harmful to expose some at-risk patients to additional dental treatments?

It is important to note that the timing of treatment is critically important for at-risk individuals. As a result, their decision to receive treatment must be made in conjunction with their physician and dentist.

#### What coverage will be provided?

Our Enhanced Benefits Program includes additional cleanings and/or applications of topical fluoride. The program addresses the unique health challenges faced by people with conditions that put them at risk for oral health disease and can also play an important role in the management of an individual's medical condition.

The costs of the additional cleanings and fluoride treatments will be applied to the annual maximum. The timing of treatment is very important when serious medical conditions exist. People that have one of these conditions should talk with their dentist and physician about if and when treatment is right for them.

#### What's the health benefit?

For people with a susceptibility to periodontal diseases, periodontal maintenance needs to be conducted at more frequent intervals to help prevent tooth loss, a complication of these diseases.

For diabetics, research has confirmed that diabetes worsens with periodontal diseases, and it strongly suggests that severe periodontal disease increases the severity of diabetes. Glycemic control has proven to be one of the best ways to prevent complications of diabetes. A number of studies strongly indicate that when people with diabetes receive more professional teeth cleanings, their blood glucose levels are much better controlled.

Clinical studies of pregnant women with periodontal disease strongly suggest that more frequent professional teeth cleanings will benefit the health of both the baby and the mother.

For people with high-risk cardiac conditions, a recent guideline by the American Heart Association indicates that an individual's overall oral health may be an important factor in avoiding infective endocarditis. Infective endocarditis occurs when bacteria, often from the mouth, enters the bloodstream and attacks the lining of the heart. At-risk individuals can reduce bacteria levels in the mouth with more frequent cleanings in an effort to lower their risk for infective endocarditis.

For people with kidney failure, or who are undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiation or who have suppressed immune systems, it is well established scientifically that people with serious health conditions like these are at increased risk for infection, generally because their immune system response has been weakened. These people can benefit from having their teeth cleaned professionally at more frequent intervals to reduce the build-up of bacteria in the mouth. This may help lower the risk that this bacteria will enter the bloodstream, create infection and further compromise their health.

Head and neck radiation causes some specific additional oral health problems. According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), prevention of problems in the mouth is critical to obtaining the maximum benefit from cancer treatment, and people are encouraged to see a dentist before beginning cancer treatment. Because a common side effect of head and neck radiation is an increase in cavities, the NIDCR recommends fluoride treatment and the use of prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste by those undergoing this treatment. Enrollees who are receiving this type of radiation should ask their dentist if they would benefit from prescription strength fluoride toothpaste. This product is often covered by medical/prescription drug benefit plans.