

## ORAL PIERCINGS CAN BE TRENDY BUT POSE POTENTIAL HEALTH CARE RISKS

**May 2009, Lisle, Ill.** — Like clothing and hairstyles, oral piercings give teens and adults a way to express themselves. While trendy, [Delta Dental of Illinois](#) warns this fashion statement poses a number of potential oral and overall health care risks.

“Before getting a lip, cheek or tongue piercing, people need to be aware of the potential side effects,” said Dr. Katina Morelli, D.D.S. dental director at Delta Dental of Illinois. “For those who already have oral piercings, routine dental exams are the best way to prevent any complications from occurring. A dentist can also provide information on proper care for the piercing to prevent temporary or permanent damage to the mouth.”

### **Some potential complications of oral piercings include:**

- **Swelling** – Piercing may cause swelling of the tongue. In extreme cases a severely swollen tongue can actually close off the airway and prevent breathing.
- **Prolonged bleeding** – A blood vessel punctured while piercing may cause severe bleeding.
- **Damage to the sublingual salivary glands** - An improperly placed tongue piercing may damage the sublingual salivary glands, which produce five percent of saliva entering the oral cavity.
- **Choking** - Jewelry may become loose in the mouth, creating a choking hazard.
- **Plaque build-up** – Plaque may build up on piercings, requiring more frequent cleanings.
- **Damage to the teeth and gums** - Jewelry may come in contact with both the teeth and gums, causing chipped or cracked teeth or gum recession.
- **Allergic reaction** – Jewelry containing certain metals may cause an allergic reaction.
- **Nerve damage** – A piercing that strikes a nerve may cause nerve damage, leading to numbness or loss of sensation at the piercing site.
- **Infection** – The wound from the piercing, coupled with teeming bacteria in the mouth, may create an increased risk of infection.

If you get an oral piercing, make sure to follow home-care instructions, including cleaning, provided by your dentist or piercing specialist. A dentist can prescribe an antimicrobial rinse to help keep the pierced site and jewelry clean. Proper oral hygiene is critical to preventing immediate, short-term or long-term complications.

If complications arise from an oral piercing, schedule an appointment with a dentist. Dentists are trained to monitor and manage oral health problems and will work with a physician to manage serious conditions.

To find out more about oral health, contact a Delta Dental dentist. Find a local Delta Dental dentist by visiting [www.deltadentalil.com](http://www.deltadentalil.com) and clicking on the “Dentist Search” link.

[Delta Dental of Illinois](#) (DDIL) is a not-for-profit dental service corporation specializing in providing comprehensive, easy-to-use and cost-effective benefits to 1.4 million employees and family members in more than 3,600 Illinois employee groups. Based in Lisle, Ill., DDIL offers an array of extensive nationwide network-based managed fee-for-service, PPO and dental HMO plans.