



Delta Dental of Illinois Helps to Give Kids a Healthy Smile
February is National Children's Dental Health Month

Lisle, Ill., February 9, 2009 – February is National Children's Dental Health Month and [Delta Dental of Illinois](#) is putting in extra effort to get the word out about the importance of oral health in children.

“Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease affecting children in our state,” said Dr. Robert E. Dennison, president and CEO of [Delta Dental of Illinois](#). “It is crucial that children and their caregivers learn not only the correct brushing and flossing techniques, but also how diet, regular dentist visits and other helpful oral health hints can positively affect oral health. At Delta Dental of Illinois, we believe that it is important to educate children when they are young to ensure a lifetime of good oral health.”

According to Illinois' [IFLOSS Coalition](#), recent surveys have found that more than half of Illinois' third graders have tooth decay and one out of every 20 suffers from toothaches.

One way Delta Dental of Illinois is working to improve these statistics is by offering an educational oral health theater program called “Land of Smiles” to Illinois elementary schools. This year, the show is travelling to more than 100 schools and reaching 30,000 children across Illinois. During National Children's Dental Health Month, the program is visiting two Give Kids a Smile Day Events in southern Illinois and 36 schools in southern Illinois and the Chicagoland area. Please view the following link for a complete listing of schools.

<http://www.deltadentalil.com/aboutus/ourcommunity>

Land of Smiles

During the Land of Smiles program, characters called Tooth Wizard and PlaqueMan teach children the importance of good oral health and how to get rid of what the Tooth Wizard refers to as that “icky, sticky, slimy, grimy, sort of yellowy, greeny gunk” – in other words, plaque – that causes cavities and damages teeth and gums.

The program offers a unique approach to educating children – an engaging theatrical performance based on oral health education. Throughout the program, the characters interact with kindergarten to third-grade students using an oversized tooth model and toothbrush and student volunteers to teach them about good and bad foods for teeth and the importance of regular dentist visits.

[Please view the following link for a video of a past performance

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEhtvgz0NLw>.]

“The Land of Smiles show is phenomenal and other schools will definitely benefit from the performances,” said Salvatore Cannella, vice principal at Swift Elementary School in Chicago. “The students were very enthusiastic during the show and the actors had the students engaged from the time they walked in to the time they left.”

“This is the second time that Land of Smiles has visited our school,” said Maryellen Wessendorf, school nurse at Garfield Elementary in Elgin, IL. “The students love Land of Smiles, and the teachers and principal raved about the show. The program not only introduces oral health concepts, but also reinforces the information and asks students to verbalize their understanding. In fact, many of our students were in first grade for the last show and now as third graders, they still remember many of the techniques concerning brushing and flossing.”

Reinforcing Good Oral Health

The oral health experience extends beyond the stage performance. Every child who attends the program receives a “dental treat” bag containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and an oral health brochure explaining the importance of good oral health. Each school receives a “Teeth on the Go” curriculum kit for educators to use to help reinforce good oral health habits with their students.

In addition to the Land of Smiles program, Delta Dental of Illinois supports other oral health education efforts and offers the following tips to help parents and caregivers maintain children’s oral health:

- **Keep a baby’s mouth clean and start brushing.** With the appearance of the first tooth, a baby’s gum and tooth area should be cleaned with a soft washcloth or a soft infant toothbrush at least once a day. Once a child has seven to eight teeth, use water or a non-fluoride toothpaste and a soft child-sized toothbrush for daily cleaning. By the time a child is two years of age, brush his or her teeth twice a day, preferably after breakfast and before bedtime. Once the child will spit, and not swallow toothpaste, begin using a fluoride toothpaste.
- **Floss.** When a child has two baby teeth adjoining each other, begin using floss.
- **Never put a child to bed with a bottle or sippy cup.** If a bottle is needed at bedtime, fill it with water rather than sugary liquids.
- **Help children establish good oral hygiene.** Brush and floss with children regularly until they are around nine years-of-age. Supervision – and working together – is necessary until the child is capable of doing it on his or her own.
- **Visit the dentist.** Unless a problem is suspected, visit the dentist between a child’s first and second birthdays, with regular appointments thereafter.
- **Sealants.** Ask the dentist about applying sealants to help prevent tooth decay. Sealants are thin plastic coatings applied to the chewing surface of permanent teeth located in the back of the mouth – the hardest to clean.
- **Watch the diet.** Avoid allowing children to have sugar in the mouth for long periods of time. Stay away from sucking candies and chewing gum containing sugar and refrain from drinking soft drinks regularly (unless sugar-free).
- **Regularly check children’s mouths.** In addition to scheduling regular checkups, periodically check children’s mouths for signs of periodontal disease, including bleeding, swollen and/or bright red gums, persistent bad breath and gums that have receded from the teeth.

More oral health information can be found on Delta Dental of Illinois’ website at www.deltadentalil.com.

About Delta Dental of Illinois

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.

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