



The 2022 State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report

Commissioned by Delta Dental Plans Association

Table of contents

1. Foreword from James W. Hutchison, President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association	03
2. A message from Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA, Chief Dental Officer, Delta Dental Plans Association	04
3. Oral health is critically important to overall health, but more education is needed	05
4. Adults and children continue to practice proper oral care habits at home	07
5. Adults and children make preventive visits to the dentist a priority	09
6. Dental insurance continues to promote optimal oral health	11
7. About the research	13

Foreword from James W. Hutchison

President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association

Good oral health is essential to good overall health — and I'm heartened to see that nearly all adults and parents in the United States agree.

As the nation's largest dental insurance provider, Delta Dental is committed to helping people improve their oral health and, by extension, their overall health. The "State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report" examines consumers' oral health behaviors, preferences and needs, providing insight into how we can best partner with our customers, providers, partners and communities.

According to our most recent survey, U.S. adults and children are increasingly making oral health care a priority. More children visited their dentist for preventive care last year than the year before, and a majority of parents report that the pandemic motivated them to not put off seeking treatment for an oral health care issue. This is good news.

That said, while our survey finds that most adults and parents understand that oral health is critically important to overall health, it seems that most don't fully realize the ways oral health is linked to serious health issues. For example, most adults didn't know that poor oral health can be linked to strokes, high blood pressure and

diabetes. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding isn't surprising. Even with the knowledge that one cannot have good overall health without good oral health, we often think of the mouth and body as two distinct parts. Delta Dental wants to change this.

I'm proud that Delta Dental is raising awareness to ensure more people, including policymakers, understand how essential oral health is to other areas of their health and to encourage persons of all ages to turn that knowledge into action through healthy habits. I look forward to continuing our partnership with Americans on their journey to better health.



James W. Hutchison
President & CEO,
Delta Dental Plans Association



A message from

Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA
Chief Dental Officer,
 Delta Dental Plans Association

As a dentist for nearly 40 years, I'm keenly aware of the close relationship between our oral health and our overall health and well-being. In fact, 1 in 5 adults share that an oral health issue they experienced affected their overall health. Proper oral care habits can enhance the quality of our life. In this study, I'm pleased to see that parents are doing a pretty good job of attending to their children's oral care habits. For example, 55% are within the guidelines for changing out their children's toothbrushes in a timely manner. This simple action is one of many ways to help demonstrate to children the significance of establishing lifelong healthy oral care habits while they're young.

I also welcome the news that most children and adults visited the dentist last year, with more making preventive visits than the prior year. This increase in dental visits may represent a catch-up

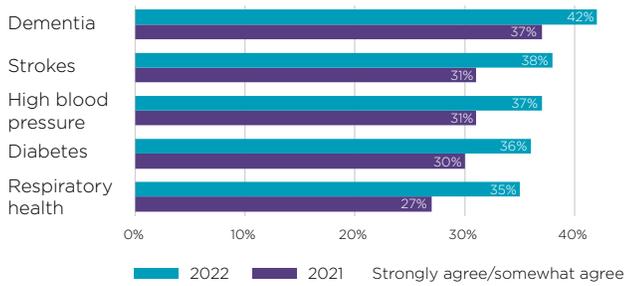
effort following the first year of the pandemic. Regardless of the motivation, this exciting uptick demonstrates people in America taking an active approach to their oral health. And as the research shows, dental insurance is playing a role in improving the likelihood of good oral health by making dental care more affordable. Almost 9 in 10 adults indicate that dental insurance allows them to have good oral health, brings peace of mind, saves money, and helps them live a healthier life. Education is key as we work together for the good of our nation's health, and I'm delighted to see that nearly all (90%) adults want to learn more about oral health's link to overall health.

Respectfully,
 Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA

Oral health is critically important to overall health, but more education is needed

While nearly all adults (92%) and parents (96%) report they consider oral health to be very, if not extremely, important to overall health, many aren't aware of the serious health issues linked to poor oral health. And awareness of these types of connections is not improving over time. Instead, as the world finds itself in the third year of the pandemic, more adults in this year's survey than those polled in 2021 are unable to make the connection between dental issues and other more serious or disruptive health conditions.

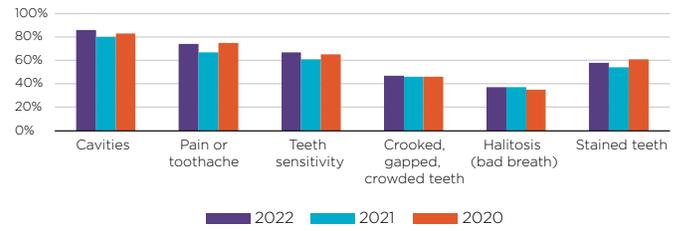
Percentage of consumers not aware of oral health's connection to serious health conditions



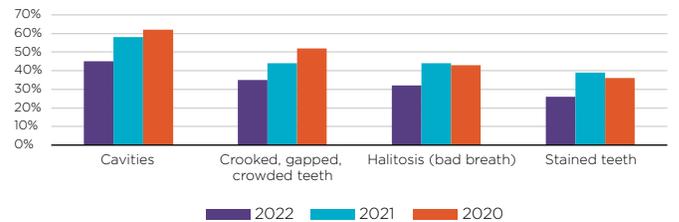
One critical reason for people to learn more about these connections is that adults and children have plenty of personal experience dealing with dental issues. In fact, **1 in 5 (20%) adults believe that an oral health issue they experienced directly affected their overall health.**

While more adults report oral health issues this year than last, **significantly fewer parents disclose in 2022 that their children are experiencing or have experienced oral health issues than indicated in 2021 and 2020.**

Percentage of adults who experienced oral health issues this past survey



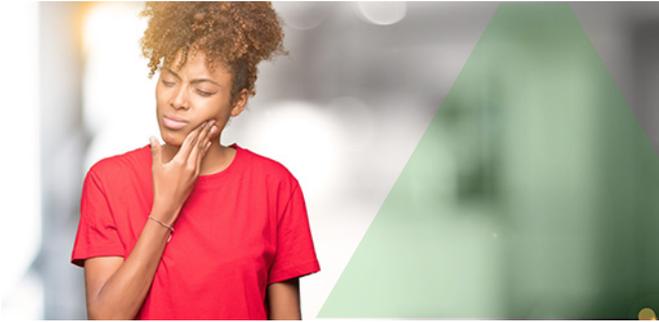
Percentage of children who experienced oral health issues this past survey



“Over the past 30 years, science has increasingly shown the association between gum disease and heart disease, diabetes, pulmonary disease and dementia, among other serious health conditions. One recent study found gum inflammation could increase the risk of cognitive dysfunction, while other research indicated poor oral health is connected to worse COVID-19 outcomes. Many studies demonstrate the importance of taking care of your mouth as a part of supporting overall health and wellness.”

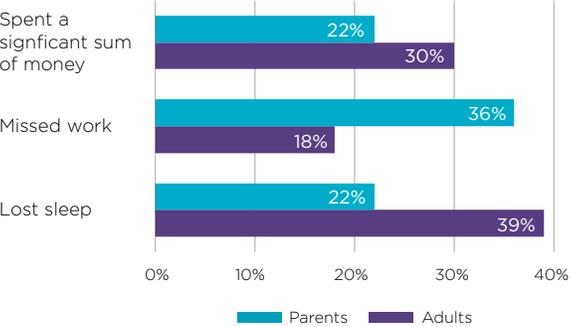


Linda Vidone, DMD
Vice President, Chief Clinical Officer,
Delta Dental of Massachusetts



Many adults and parents indicate that when oral health issues arise, the associated physical discomfort or potential long-term effects on their overall health may not be all that they worry about.

Percentage of consumers that experienced unwanted consequences due to oral health issues



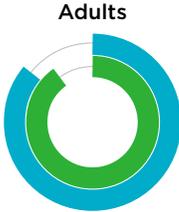
Parents are particularly worried about how oral health issues might affect their children, though fewer are concerned this year over last:

- Seven in 10 (70%) are concerned that such issues will have a negative impact on their child’s overall confidence (vs. 77% who felt the same in 2021).
- Nearly 1 in 2 (45%) parents with children ages 3-17 report their child experienced an unplanned oral health issue across 2021. Among them, their child missed an average of three days of school in 2021 because of these oral health issues, which is significantly less than the 4.5 days of school, including virtual/remote learning, missed in 2020 and on par with the three days missed in 2019 for the same reasons.

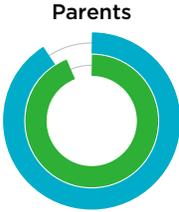
It follows that parents believe there is certainly room for improvement regarding their child’s oral health.

Almost 1 in 3 (32%) parents are of the opinion their child currently has “excellent oral health,” and about 3 in 4 (73%) moms and dads admit their child’s oral health is not as good as it could be right now.

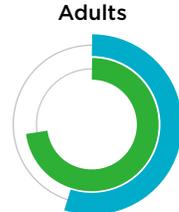
While the pandemic’s positive influence on the attention people dedicate to their health and wellness and their oral health is still high, it is beginning to wane from the 2020 survey, suggesting that more work needs to be done in order to make oral health a priority in the future.



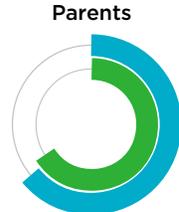
86% 2022 vs. 90% 2021 adults believe that throughout the pandemic, maintaining their oral health is essential to protecting their overall health.



91% 2022 vs. 94% 2021 parents believe that throughout the pandemic, maintaining their child’s/their oral health is essential to protecting their child’s/their overall health.



55% 2022 vs. 66% 2021 adults report oral health has become more of a priority as a result of the pandemic.



64% 2022 vs. 73% 2021 parents report oral health has become more of a priority as a result of the pandemic.



The promising news is that 9 in 10 (90%) adults are interested in learning about oral health’s critical connection to overall health.

Adults and children continue to practice proper oral care habits at home

The pandemic continues to shine a light on what can be done to improve oral health at home, though to a lesser degree than in the previous year.



63% 2022 vs. **72% 2021** adults are paying closer attention to their oral care habits due to COVID-19.

74% 2022 vs. **82% 2021** parents are paying closer attention to their child's/their oral care habits due to COVID-19.

■ 2022 Survey year ■ 2021 Survey year

A key factor in achieving optimal oral health is ensuring that teeth and mouths are being looked after regularly, and **adults and parents are doing their part to encourage proper oral health habits at home, specifically following recommended guidelines.**

During 2021, on average, children and adults:



brushed their teeth twice a day.



flossed once a day.



used mouthwash once a day.

Such habits are motivated by the health benefits

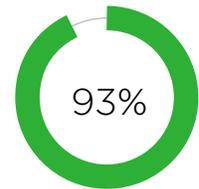
adults associate with each, with many of them brushing and flossing to prevent tooth decay (75% brushing, 59% flossing), to prevent dental issues (73% brushing, 64% flossing), and to maintain or improve their oral health (56% brushing, 46% flossing).

Other adults brush and floss for the cosmetic benefits, such as maintaining an attractive smile (50% brushing, 34% flossing) and keeping their teeth as white as possible (56% brushing).

Many people are also following the American Dental Association guidelines on how often to replace toothbrushes.



Adults who switch out their brush at least once every three months.



Nearly all parents switch their child's toothbrush at least once a month.



Many adults also turn to dental products beyond their toothbrushes (63% regular toothbrush, 37% electronic) and their flossing products (64% string floss, 12% electronic water flosser, and 15% toothpick) to improve their oral health and their smiles.



Nearly 1 in 2 (49%) use fluoride products.



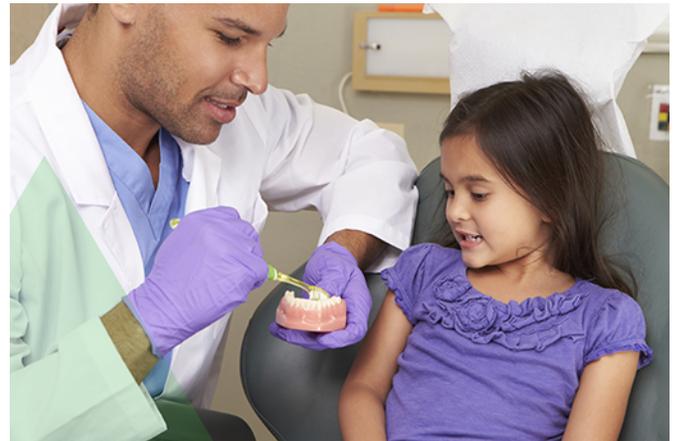
Fifteen percent use a tongue scraper.



One in 5 (20%) use whitening products.



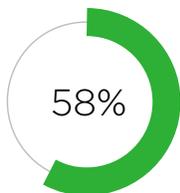
Ten percent use guards (mouthguard and night guard).



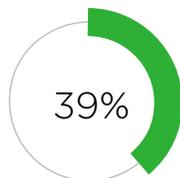
One in 4 (25%) believe their child doesn't like the taste of toothpaste.

Parents acknowledge fluoride as an important part of preventing cavities. About 4 in 5 (79%) moms and dads believe fluoride is very, if not extremely, important to their child's oral health.

However, many parents still recognize there is room for their child's oral health habits to improve. In fact, 1 in 2 parents believe poor oral health practices, like not brushing enough (50%) and not flossing enough (50%), represent areas for improvement for their child's oral health. But getting their child to get on board with better oral care behaviors is a challenge. About 2 in 3 (65%) moms and dads find it difficult to get their child to brush their teeth because:



believe brushing their child's teeth takes time away from things their child would rather be doing.



think their child simply finds it boring.



Childhood is the ideal time for developing habits to keep your child's smile healthy for a lifetime. Introduce tooth brushing to your child as soon as they can hold a toothbrush. Also, make brushing their teeth fun from the start through choices. Let your child choose a fun toothbrush and a cheerful song for two minutes of brushing. Children love to mimic their parents, so lead by example and reward for a job well done.



Sheila Strock, DMD, MPH
Vice President, Dental Services & Chief Science Officer, Delta Dental of Illinois

Adults and children make preventive visits to the dentist a priority

Just as in 2020, a majority of people saw their dentist in 2021. In fact, most children (89%) and adults (72%) went to the dentist last year, and **significantly more of them visited their dentist for preventive reasons in 2021 than in the prior year:**



It's clear that many are prioritizing their preventive dental care for all the right reasons. Among those adults who saw their dentist for a preventive visit in 2021, they averaged two visits across 12 months.

About 3 in 5 (59%) adults made a preventive visit in 2021 to reduce their chances of experiencing serious dental issues. Others visited the dentist to take full advantage of their dental insurance, which covers at least one annual visit and cleaning (47%), or because they know their oral health is connected to their overall health (42%).



With the majority of adults and children in the United States seeing their dentist annually for preventive care, not only can they maintain their oral health better, but dental problems can be found earlier. By taking a proactive approach with oral health maintenance, you can address dental concerns more simply, at a lower cost, and with better treatment outcomes. Most Delta Dental insurance plans cover preventive care at 100%.

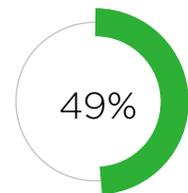


Keith Libou, DMD
Chief Clinical Officer,
Delta Dental of New Jersey and Connecticut

Boomers are more likely than younger generations to prioritize preventive visits because:



of Boomers believe preventive visits reduce the chance of serious dental issues.



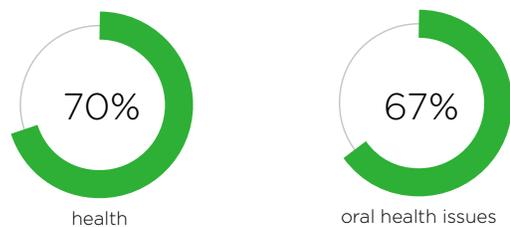
of Boomers know how important oral health is to overall health.

Despite the rise in preventive dental visits, receiving dental care is not without its challenges. A positive takeaway is that while roughly the same number of adults share they experienced barriers to receiving care in 2021 as in 2020 (preventive: 68% in 2021, 2020 and reactive: 58% in 2021, 2020), **far fewer parents report they faced barriers to seeking care for their children in 2021 than 2020:**



Despite the barriers, adults and parents report that they plan to prioritize dental visits in 2022. In fact, nearly all (94%) adults plan on making a dentist visit this year. Roughly 2 in 5 who will seek preventive (39%) and reactive (43%) care in 2022 will go to the dentist regardless of the state of the pandemic.

Parents report the pandemic has motivated them not to put off seeking treatment for their child's:

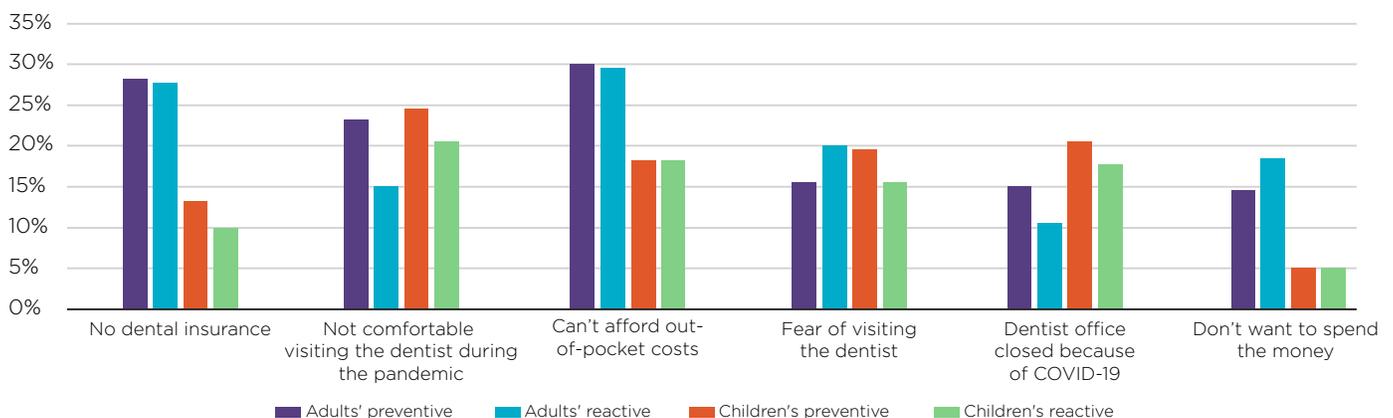


Adults report the pandemic has motivated them not to put off seeking treatment for their own:



The barriers adults and parents and their children faced range from financial to emotional, such as their own or their child's fear of visiting the dentist and COVID-19, which continued to be a top barrier to receiving care in 2021.

Types of barriers to oral health care that consumers faced in 2021



Dental insurance continues to promote optimal oral health

Currently, more than 3 in 5 (62%) adults across the country have dental insurance. Similarly, 85% of parents report their child is covered. And nearly all adults who are currently insured **recognize that their dental insurance is critical in helping them to achieve optimal oral health, specifically:**



Among the adults and children who visited the dentist in 2021, those with dental benefits were significantly more likely to have sought preventive care than those without coverage, proving that dental insurance is critical in helping adults and children seek proper oral care from their dentist.

Percentage of adults who visited the dentist in 2021



Percentage of children who visited the dentist in 2021



Similarly, adults and children with coverage were less likely than those without coverage to face barriers to receiving a range of care from their dentist.

Preventive dental care: adults who faced barriers



Preventive dental care: children who faced barriers



Reactive dental care: adults who faced barriers



Reactive dental care: children who faced barriers





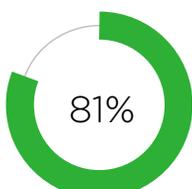
The recent seminal report from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR): *Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges* observes, while good oral health is vitally important to the health and well-being of everyone, oral health care has not been, and is not, equitably available across America. Removing barriers to care is critical and, as both the report and this survey clearly confirm, having dental benefits significantly improves access to care for all individuals.



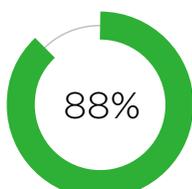
Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA
Chief Dental Officer,
Delta Dental Plans Association

Most adults **who have dental insurance recognize the emotional and financial benefits that come with having coverage.** Notably, almost 9 in 10 (89%) adults agree that having coverage gives them peace of mind, provides relief from worrying about what they would do in a dental emergency, and gives them confidence in their smile. Even more, adults agree that their insurance saves them money in the long run (94%) and is well worth the cost (91%), further validating that the advantages of dental insurance extend beyond encouraging better oral health.

During times of uncertainty, the benefits of dental insurance are critical. Adults and parents concur that:

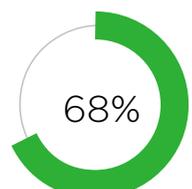


Adults

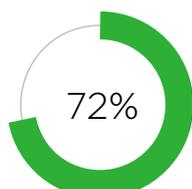


Parents

having dental insurance during the pandemic gave them peace of mind.



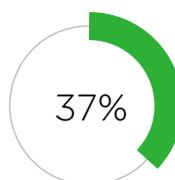
Adults



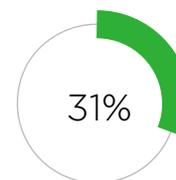
Parents

appreciated their/their child's dental insurance more than ever during the pandemic.

However, 96 million adults do not currently have dental insurance, with cost being a key barrier.



cannot afford the monthly premium payment.



cannot afford to pay additional out-of-pocket costs.

Fortunately, 3 in 10 (30%) of them think they will likely secure dental insurance in 2022, likely because 89% of those who are uninsured see the value in dental coverage. And nearly 7 in 10 (69%) parents with a child not currently covered by dental insurance indicate that they will do the same. Their motivation to seek out coverage is in part due to COVID-19. **Three in 5 (60%) parents with uninsured children and about 1 in 3 (31%) uninsured adults admit the pandemic has motivated them to seek out dental insurance.**

About the research

Delta Dental Plans Association commissioned a third-party market research firm, Material, to undertake research that formed the basis for this report. Material conducted its research between January 19 and January 28, 2022, using an email invitation and online surveys to two audiences recruited through an opt-in panel:

- 1,172 parents of children ages 12 and younger.
- 1,027 nationally representative Americans ages 18+.

Geographic distribution quotas were set to ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the U.S. population of adults and parents with children ages 12 and younger. Research in this report has a margin of error of +/- 3%.

About Delta Dental Plans Association

Based in Oak Brook, Illinois, Delta Dental Plans Association is the not-for-profit national association of the 39 independent Delta Dental companies. Through these companies, Delta Dental is the nation's largest dental insurance provider, covering more than 83 million Americans, and offering the country's largest dental network with approximately 154,000 participating dentists. Over the last decade, Delta Dental companies provided over \$1.75 billion in direct and in-kind support to improve the oral health of our communities across the country.

The nation's leading dental insurance provider

We make it easy to protect your smile and keep it healthy, with the largest network of dentists nationwide, quick answers, and personalized service.

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