

2011 Children's Oral Health Survey

*Information Empowering Parents to
Improve Their Kids' Oral Health*





Improving the Oral Health of Children and Their Families

As a national system of not-for-profit dental service organizations and the nation's largest dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental is proudly committed to improving the oral health of the nation's children and their families. Our member companies are passionately engaged in this mission, working with caregivers and children to promote oral health knowledge and remove barriers to care for disadvantaged and at-risk children.

We commissioned a national survey of children's primary caregivers to gain insight about the oral health knowledge of caregivers and the status of their children's oral health. Michigan-based Morpace Inc. conducted email interviews with 907 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. With this research, Delta Dental hopes to help educate and improve the oral health of American families.

The survey revealed that while many Americans rate their children's oral health as "excellent," there are clear gaps in understanding of basic oral health knowledge and actual behavior.

Expecting mother’s oral health can affect her baby.

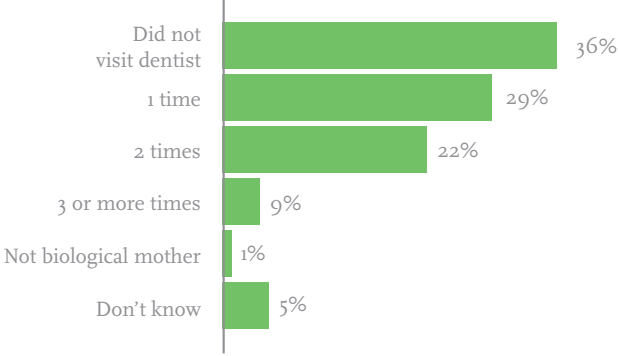
Pregnant women no doubt want the best care for their babies, but many don’t realize how that means caring for themselves and their smiles.

In fact, nearly four in 10 American mothers neglected to visit a dentist during pregnancy – a significantly important behavior for helping prevent harmful oral and overall health problems for themselves and their babies.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy can exaggerate the way gum tissue reacts to plaque, increasing the risk for gingivitis, the first stage of periodontal (gum) disease. Some studies have suggested that pregnant women with moderate to severe gum disease may be more at risk to give birth to low-weight or pre-term babies, who are at risk for many serious diseases.

Women who are trying to become pregnant should schedule a dental checkup and cleaning and take care of any dental problems. Once you are pregnant, it still isn’t too late to see your dentist. During a routine checkup, your dentist can identify and treat teeth and gum problems.

Number of Dentist Visits During Pregnancy (Among Mothers)



Source: Delta Dental Children’s Oral Health Survey, 2011

Oral Health Tips for Expecting Mothers

- Brush your teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. Floss daily.
- If you suffer from “morning sickness,” make sure to rinse your mouth out with water and baking soda solution afterward. The combination will neutralize acid that could lead to dental disease.
- Limit foods containing sugar to mealtime only.
- Choose water or low-fat milk as a beverage and avoid carbonated drinks.
- Choose fruit rather than fruit juice to meet the recommended daily fruit intake.

Oral health care should begin at birth.

The Children's Oral Health Survey revealed that most American caregivers don't realize that cavities are nearly *100 percent preventable*. Tooth decay can develop anytime after the teeth erupt into the mouth, starting at about 6 months of age. So from birth, it's important to establish good oral health habits to keep cavity-causing bacteria at bay.

Before the first tooth erupts, dentists recommend that caregivers wipe their baby's gums with a damp washcloth or soft infant toothbrush after meals. Cleaning the baby's gums will help keep bacteria levels low and maintain a clean home for his or her new teeth.

Caregivers should also never put a child to bed with a bottle of milk, juice, sweetened water or soft drinks. The frequent exposure to sugar can lead to severe tooth decay – often called baby bottle decay. Instead, caregivers should fill the bottle with water. Infants and very young children have more of a desire to suck than to have sweet liquids.

Twenty-eight percent of caregivers don't clean their baby's gums. Among those who do, 28 percent clean them just a few times a week or less.

Nearly one in five caregivers (17 percent) with a child 4 years old or younger report that their child goes to bed every night with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice.



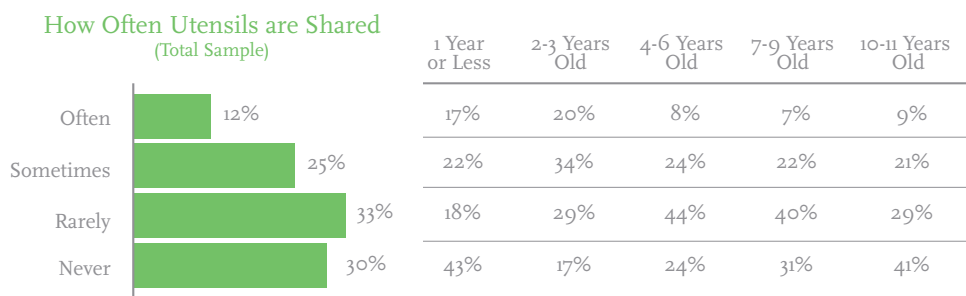


Caregivers can pass dental disease to children.

Most caregivers don't know that they can actually pass harmful bacteria from their mouths to their children's mouths, which can put children at an increased risk for cavities.

Bacteria are passed through the transfer of saliva. Typically, this takes place through natural, paternal behaviors, such as sharing eating utensils or licking a baby's pacifier to clean it.

Those with a history of poor oral health and frequent cavities are most likely to pass the germs along. To protect children's teeth, caregivers should cut back on saliva-transferring behaviors and strive to keep their own mouths healthy.

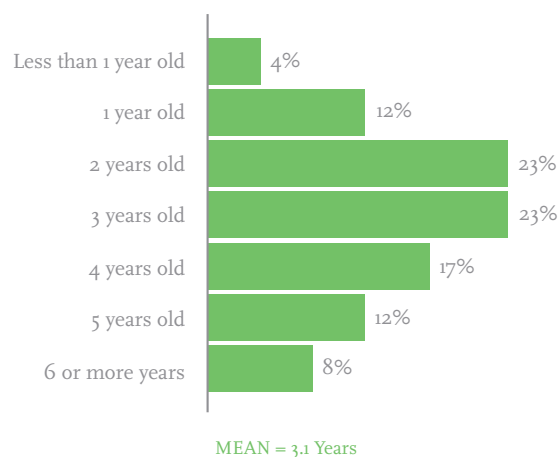


Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2011

Most American children first visit the dentist far later than recommended.

Regular dental visits are vital to good oral health – and a habit that should start sooner rather than later. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that a child go to the dentist by age 1 or within six months after the first tooth erupts. Yet, most American children don't see their family dentist until they are more than 3 years old.

Age of Child At First Dentist Visit
(Among Those Who Have Been to the Dentist)



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2011

What to Expect at Your Child's First Visit

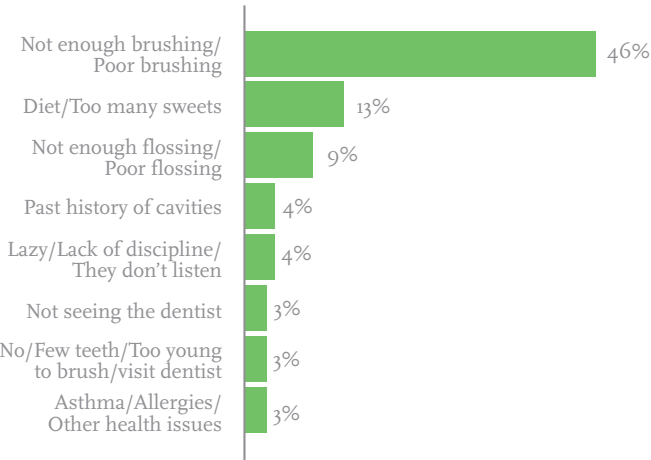
During the first visit, the dentist will examine your child's teeth for early signs of decay, but will also look for problems with the baby's head, neck, jaws, skin and soft tissues in and around the mouth, including the tongue, cheeks and lips.

The dentist will also:

- Assess the child's bite, facial growth and development
- Demonstrate various tooth brushing and flossing techniques and positions to help parents care for their baby's teeth properly
- Discuss diet and feeding/snacking practices that may put the child at risk for decay
- Discuss the use of topical fluoride
- Provide information about trauma prevention

Poor brushing habits may be the major obstacle keeping children from having excellent oral health.

Obstacles to Children Having Excellent Oral Health
(Among Those Who Rate Less Than Excellent – Top Mentions)



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2011

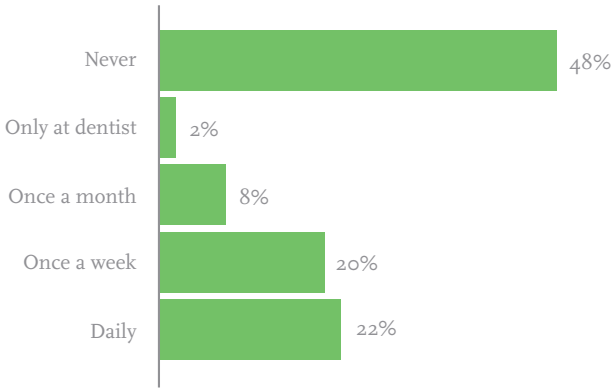
Developing proper brushing habits is an important part of maintaining good oral health. As children's teeth begin to come in, it becomes increasingly important that they are brushed for at least two minutes twice daily with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.

Thirty-five percent of caregivers say their children brush their teeth less than twice a day and only 56 percent say their children brush their teeth for at least two minutes.

Lack of flossing could be another contributor to poor oral health among children.

Flossing is the single best way to remove plaque from areas between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Once a child has two teeth that touch side-by-side, it's time to start flossing daily. Once a child is 10 years old, he or she should be able to floss without help.

How Often Teeth Are Flossed
(Among Children Who Have Teeth Already)



Source: Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey, 2011

We're on a mission to improve oral health.

Information gathered in the 2011 Children's Oral Health Survey is one example of our commitment to improving America's oral health. As a national system of dental service organizations and the nation's largest dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental Plans Association and its member companies support programs that focus on preventing dental disease, expanding access to care, advancing dental science and understanding the connections between oral and overall health.



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