



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **For Immediate Release**

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### **February is Children's Dental Health Month** *A Baby's Oral Health Care Should Begin at Birth*

**DENVER (January XX, 2012)** – February is National Children's Dental Health Month and a great time to brush up on how to help keep cavities out of children's mouths and create a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Most Colorado caregivers don't realize that cavities are nearly 100 percent preventable, according to a survey by Delta Dental of Colorado.<sup>1</sup> Tooth decay can develop any time after teeth erupt in the mouth, which typically starts at around 6 months of age. So from birth, it's important to establish good oral health habits to keep away cavity-causing bacteria and help prevent cavities.

"Caregivers might think that because their child's baby teeth will eventually fall out, that caring for them is less important," said Dr. Fiona Collins, dental director for Delta Dental of Colorado. "But baby teeth help children chew and speak properly, help development and hold space for permanent teeth."

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.

According to the survey, seven in 10 Colorado caregivers (70 percent) knew it was correct to clean a baby's gums with a soft cloth before the teeth surface, but 28 percent reported only cleaning their baby's gums a few times a week or less.

Nearly one in five caregivers (18 percent) with a child 4 years old or younger report that he or she goes to bed every night or a few times a week with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice. Caregivers should not put a child to bed with a bottle of milk, juice, sweetened water or soft drinks, Collins noted. 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.

Here are some additional steps you can take to ensure your little one has a healthy smile through childhood and into adulthood.

- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, bottles, spoons and straws to protect your baby from the transfer of cavity-causing bacteria.
- As soon as the first tooth erupts, begin brushing with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and water at least once a day, preferably before bedtime. Once any two of your child's teeth are touching, it's time to start flossing once a day.
- Within six months of getting the first tooth – and no later than the first birthday – your baby should have his or her first dental visit.
- In a child under the age of 2, if he or she is considered at moderate or high risk for cavities, a 'smear' of fluoridated toothpaste should be used. In all children ages 2 to 5, a 'pea-sized' amount of toothpaste should be used. Be sure to train your child to spit out the toothpaste and rinse afterward. Help your child brush properly twice a day.
- You should help brush and floss or at least supervise until age 7 or 8 or until your child can properly care for his or her teeth alone.

Visit [www.MonthlyMouthfulCO.com](http://www.MonthlyMouthfulCO.com) to learn more about good oral health care.

### ***About Delta Dental of Colorado***

*Delta Dental of Colorado is the largest and most experienced provider of dental benefits in the state. As a not-for-profit, Delta Dental of Colorado invests in oral health projects through the Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation that focus on access to care, prevention, education and research. The Colorado company is a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, a national organization of not-for-profit Delta Dental plans. The national association is the largest dental benefits carrier in the nation providing coverage to more than 56 million people in nearly 95,700 employer groups.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Morpace Inc. conducted the 2011 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted by email statewide with 150 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of Colorado adults, the margin of error is ±8 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*