



## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

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**Delta Dental's *Healthy Smile, Healthy You* Focuses on Health of Pregnant Women, Diabetics and those with High Risk Cardiac Conditions**  
*Additional Dental Cleaning Important to Managing These Health Conditions*

**ROANOKE, Va. – February 18, 2010** – The eyes may be the window to the soul, but research is demonstrating that the mouth is the gateway to good health. In fact, a dental exam can reveal early symptoms of more than 100 diseases, as well as identify gum disease, which can have a negative effect on the body's overall health.

Scientific evidence suggests that early treatment and prevention of gum disease and other oral conditions can positively impact many medical conditions. Through its innovative program *Healthy Smile, Healthy You*<sup>®</sup>, Delta Dental of Virginia is focusing on three high risk groups that stand to benefit most from additional dental checkups—pregnant women, diabetics and those with high risk cardiac conditions.

Through *Healthy Smile, Healthy You*<sup>®</sup>, Delta Dental eligible members receive one additional exam and teeth cleaning – or periodontal maintenance visit if they have a history of periodontal surgery – beyond what is already covered under their group dental plan. Delta Dental has made this preventive coverage standard for most of its fully insured business and is available to self-funded groups on an as requested basis.

“The association between oral health and overall body health is especially evident with diabetes, heart disease and, in relation to periodontal disease, the delivery of premature, low birth weight babies,” says George Koumaras, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Virginia.

Studies show that when diabetics have their teeth cleaned professionally, their blood-sugar levels are easier to control. Increased sugar levels have a negative impact on oral health by increasing the severity of existing gum disease and may lead to tooth loss. In addition, diabetics who have gum disease find it far more difficult to control their sugar levels than diabetics who do not have gum problems, because the gum infections can cause increased blood sugar levels.

Gum disease and cardiovascular disease are major public health issues that impact a large number of Americans every day. Individuals with certain heart conditions have an increased risk of oral bacteria infecting their hearts. Infections such as infective endocarditis can occur when bacteria from the mouth enter the bloodstream through small oral injuries that occur most often during normal brushing, flossing or eating.

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, pregnant women with gum disease may be much more likely to have a baby born too early or too small than pregnant women without gum disease. Research indicates that a labor-inducing biological fluid is found in oral bacteria. This fluid increases with gum disease and may increase the risk of pre-term, low birth weight babies.

“No one should underestimate the importance of regular dental checkups, especially for diabetics, pregnant women and those with heart conditions,” Dr. George Koumaras, dental director, Delta Dental of Virginia. “From early detection of disease to simply maintaining good oral health, a visit to the dentist might just save your life.”

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### **About Delta Dental of Virginia**

Delta Dental of Virginia, headquartered in Roanoke, was created in 1964 by the Virginia Dental Association and chartered by the General Assembly, as a not-for-profit service corporation the same year. Delta Dental provides employee dental benefits through a variety of managed fee-for-service and PPO plans covering more than 1.4 million enrollees in more than 3,300 groups. Delta Dental of Virginia is a member company of the Delta Dental Plans Association, the nation’s largest, most experienced dental benefits carrier providing dental coverage to more than 54 million people in more than 89,000 groups across the nation.

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