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Washington Dental Service Encourages Dental Checkups as Part of Back-to-School Routine

Oral health is critical to a child's overall health; gives a good start in school

Aug. 6, 2008, Seattle – New-clothes shopping sprees and the anticipation of reconnecting with friends are time-tested “Back to School” rituals everyone is familiar with at this time of the year. If Washington Dental Service had anything to say about it, they’d add yet another tradition to the back-to-school custom: an end-of-the-summer dental exam.

With more than 51 million hours of school time lost each year because of tooth decay and related problems, Washington Dental Service, a member of the national Delta Dental Plans Association, reminds parents to make dental check ups a part of getting their children ready for the upcoming school year. It is an easy way to prevent problems and give their children a perfect start to the school year.

“A thorough dental exam is part of making sure your child has a healthy start to the new school year,” said Dr. Ronald Inge, DDS, dental director at Washington Dental Service and head of the Institute for Oral Health. “Prevention and early detection helps children avoid painful longer-term issues that keep them out of school.”

Cavities remain the most common chronic disease of childhood. A disease which affects how children learn to speak and chew food, damages self-confidence and causes missed days at school -- and can even result in emergency room visits. Left untreated, dental disease can be very painful, costly and lead to other serious lifelong health issues.

According to a 2005 “Smile Survey” conducted by the Washington State Department of Health, 59 percent of elementary school children here have cavities and/or fillings. Also on the rise among elementary age children is tooth decay in seven or more teeth.

Washington Dental Service recommends that children visit the dentist for two exams each year. In addition to maintaining regular brushing and flossing habits, other tips to prevent tooth decay include:

- Provide teeth friendly snacks like cheese, nuts and vegetables.
- Talk to your dentist about sealants, a protective coating applied to decay-vulnerable teeth.
- Drink fluoridated water. If the water isn’t fluoridated where you live, encourage your town to fluoridate its water system.

In addition, parents of young athletes should discuss mouth guards with their dentist before returning to school sports, to prevent painful and expensive oral injuries.

Early prevention, of course, is the key and often should start very early in the child’s life,

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according to Dr. Inge.

“Baby teeth are important to a child’s long-term oral health and to his or her overall health too,” he said. “Parents can get their child started on the right track by having their first dental exam by their first birthday — and maintain a routine of regular check ups all throughout their school years.”

Washington Dental Service and the Washington Dental Service Foundation have a strong commitment to reducing tooth decay among children through several oral health initiatives, including the Access to Baby & Child Dentistry program (ABCD); Cavity-Free Kids; and most recently, KC Kids, which provided \$1 million to provide no-cost dental care to low-income children in King County.

In addition, the Washington Dental Service and Foundation committed \$5 million to a new Early Childhood Oral Health Center (called ECOH), which will double the capacity of the University of Washington and Children’s Hospital to provide dental care to the underserved in the community. The Center, located at Magnuson Park, is scheduled to open in 2009.

For more information on the importance of early, regular oral healthcare, visit the American Dental Association at www.ada.org.

About Washington Dental Service and Washington Dental Service Foundation

Washington Dental Service, a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, is the leading dental benefits company in the state of Washington, delivering high-quality, affordable dental care to more than two million people through employer-sponsored programs. Established in 1954, Washington Dental Service was the nation’s first dental plan. As a nonprofit public benefit corporation, Washington Dental Service and Washington Dental Service Foundation work to increase access to dental care and promote oral health for consumers. For more information, visit www.deltadentalwa.com.

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