

NEWS RELEASE

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Frequency of Sugar Consumption Is the Scariest Thing about Halloween

Washington Dental Service champions good oral health and promotes strategies for parents this Halloween and joins Woodland Park Zoo during its annual Pumpkin Prowl event

SEATTLE, WA – October 15, 2008 – Ghosts, goblins and things that go “bump” in the night aren’t nearly as frightening as cavities and decaying teeth, according to Washington Dental Service. Each year, the nonprofit organization embarks on its annual campaign to educate parents about the severe effects that recurrent sugar consumption has on children’s teeth.

Dental disease is the number one chronic disease of early childhood. It can be painful and can affect children’s nutritional intake and early development.

More than 51 million hours of school time are lost each year, in fact, because of tooth decay and related problems. A 2005 Washington State Department of Health “Smile Survey” showed that nearly 60 percent of elementary school-aged children in the state of Washington suffer from preventable dental decay. Nearly 25 percent suffer from cavities in seven or more teeth.

By observing a few simple strategies and using common sense, however, parents can help protect their kids’ teeth and mount an attack on the large quantities of sugar they’ll find in their little ones’ goodie bags.

“Dental disease is a year-round concern for parents and children, but even more so during Halloween,” said Dr. Ron Inge, vice president and dental director at Washington Dental Service. “By following a few simple practices, parents can help their children reduce the negative impacts of too much sugar.”

As part of its strategy to raise community awareness, Washington Dental Service is partnering with Woodland Park Zoo during its annual three-day event, “Pumpkin Prowl,” from 5-8 p.m., Oct. 24-26. Pumpkin Prowl hosts more than 15,000 parents and children in the community with a Halloween celebration, including live entertainment, activities, costumes and trick or treating. For more information on ticket prices and a list of activities, visit www.deltadentalwa.com or www.zoo.org or call the zoo’s general information line at (206) 548-2500.

According to Dr. Inge, a few simple practices, with an emphasis on limiting the duration that

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children's teeth are exposed to sugar, can prove effective in helping to prevent tooth decay:

- Avoid hard or chewy candies, including suckers, caramels, popcorn balls and gum with sugar. These are often the worst offenders since they can bathe teeth in sugar for long periods of time and can be problematic for children wearing braces and other oral appliances.
- Give your children small candy bars and other candies that can be consumed more quickly and easily.
- Avoid letting kids "graze" because it can increase the exposure of teeth to sugar.
- Monitor how much candy your children eat. Permitting them to eat a few small pieces in one sitting followed by drinking a glass of water or a thorough tooth brushing is an effective way to combat the effects of sugary candy.
- Offer your children alternatives such as sugar-free candy, nuts or cheese.
- Consider Xylitol gum or candy. Xylitol is proven to prevent cavities.

Sugar is the fuel that naturally-occurring bacteria in the mouth use to create destructive acids. Over time, these acids destroy tooth enamel and eventually cause tooth decay.

"Encouraging good oral health habits during Halloween and throughout the year will promote good oral health habits for a lifetime," said Dr. Inge. "By following these tips, parents will ensure that a little extra candy at Halloween won't be a setback for your kids' oral and overall health."

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, Washington Dental Service and WDS 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 Seattle Children's Hospital to provide dental care to the underserved children in the community. The center, which will be located at Magnuson Park, is scheduled to open in 2009.

For more information on oral health tips and the importance of early, regular oral health care, 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 2 million people through employer-sponsored programs. Established in 1954, Washington Dental Service was the nation's first dental benefits carrier. As a nonprofit, public benefit corporation, Washington Dental Service and Washington Dental Service Foundation work to improve oral health in order to improve overall health. For more information, visit www.deltadentalwa.com.

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