



CHECK UP



Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts

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A Quarterly Newsletter from Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts

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In This Issue

- ◆ Dental Health Can Impact Learning
- ◆ New CDT-4 Codes
- ◆ Scientists Grow Teeth in Laboratory
- ◆ Online Access for Dentists
- ◆ Dental Benefits Keep the Workforce Healthy
- ◆ Market Trends
- ◆ Dental Advice

Dental Health Can Impact Learning

Important Health Information from Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts

Most people know that making sure their children see a dentist on a regular basis is an important step toward ensuring their overall health. However, good dental health can also have a tremendous impact on the learning ability of school-aged children.

Untreated dental problems in children, for example, can hinder their performance in school. Problems such as decay and trauma can cause school children severe pain and keep them from learning in the classroom. And sometimes these problems keep them out of the classroom altogether. **The fact is, U.S. children lose an estimated 51 million school hours each year due to dental-related illness.**

“Painful, chronic dental problems can hurt a student’s ability to thrive,” notes Dr. Robert Compton, Director of Disease Management for Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts. “Early tooth loss due to decay can impair speech development, and students may fall behind in schoolwork due to increased absences.”

School nurses report a range of dental problems in children they see, including dental cavities, gum disease, poor bite, loose teeth, and oral trauma. If left untreated, the pain and infection from these oral health problems can lead to trouble eating, speaking and learning.

Holiday Schedule



Thursday, November 28th
Thanksgiving Day

Friday, November 29th
Day After Thanksgiving

Wednesday, December 25th
Christmas Day

Wednesday, January 1st
New Year’s Day

CDT-4 Codes Changes Announced

Effective January 1, 2003, a new set of CDT codes will become effective. These codes are used throughout the dental insurance industry, and they are changed or updated periodically with the intent to help dentists better document the dental care they provide to patients. The new codes reflect changes in clinical practice and also serve to simplify the existing coding and claim filing process. The new Code on Dental Procedures and Nomenclature, published in CDT-4, includes 52 new codes and 40 codes with revised nomenclature or revised descriptors. Some 27 codes have been deleted.

This administrative change will not affect the way patients receive treatment. HIPAA Legislation requires the use of these codes, and the Delta Dental systems will be updated and operational with the new updated CDT-4 codes on January 1, 2003.

Boston Scientists Discover Way to Grow Teeth in Lab

In the past, dentistry has almost exclusively focused on restoring existing tooth damage caused by disease or accidents. Only recently has the focus shifted to a more preventive approach. Generally referred to as evidence-based dentistry, this approach seeks to improve non-surgical treatment options and less invasive procedures.

Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts has been a pioneer in evidence-based dentistry and established its Oral Health Center in Southborough, MA, in 1999 to study evidence-based treatment options. Delta also partners with other research institutions such as Harvard School of Dental Medicine and The Forsyth Institute to further the practice of modern dentistry.

Now, according to the Boston Globe, researchers at the Forsyth Institute have discovered a method for growing living

teeth in the laboratory. The researchers have already grown batches of tooth crowns, each about the size of one of the capital letters on this page. With refinements they hope that the technique could be used to grow larger, more complete teeth in the future.

According to the Boston Globe article, "the teeth are strikingly accurate versions of natural teeth, and represent the first time that anyone has been able to coax such a complex tooth structure from a collection of individual cells. The work raises the possibility that dentists of the future could dispense with mechanical implants—such as dentures, bridges, and crowns—and literally grow new teeth for patients on demand."

This discovery could very well be the beginning of a dental revolution.

Tips for Protecting Trick-or-Treaters' Teeth



Halloween is just around the corner, and no dentist wants to spook kids or their parents with tales of tooth decay caused by candy. "If a child eats sugary sweets, then goes to bed without brushing and flossing properly, the effect can be damaging to young teeth," says Dr. Robert Compton, Director of Disease Management for Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts. "There's nothing wrong with kids enjoying a few Halloween treats. The trick is to moderate their intake of sweets and make sure they stick to their brushing-and-flossing routine."

Here are some fun and creative ways to protect your child's smile and encourage good dental-care habits this Halloween:

- ◆ Serve a healthy supper. A good meal before trick-or-treating leaves less room for sugary sweets.
- ◆ Set up a candy "bank." Allow your child four or five pieces of candy, then store the rest in a sealed container (freeze chocolates and candy bars). Establish times when the "bank" will be open for withdrawals over the next month.
- ◆ Offer tooth-friendly fare to trick-or-treaters. Consider sugar-free treats or travel sizes of toothpaste and dental floss. Just remember that although treats like dried fruit might be more nutritious than gummy candy, both hold decay-producing acid against teeth for longer periods of time than other snacks.
- ◆ Make sure candy is age-appropriate. Don't give children ages five and under jaw breakers or hard candies. These can chip teeth or cause choking.
- ◆ Make sure kids brush before bedtime. Offer your child a new, brightly colored toothbrush as a final Halloween treat.

All of us at Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts wish you and your employees a happy and safe Halloween.

Delta's Online Services Now Available for Dentists

In April 2002, Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts successfully launched its online services for accounts. This initiative allows benefit administrators to view eligibility and claim status, benefit levels and deductibles and maximums for their enrolled employees.

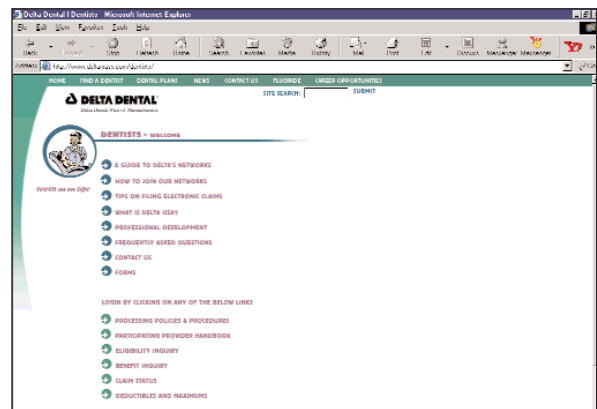
Now, we have successfully added our participating dentists to those who can take advantage of our free online features. In fact, the dental community has embraced this new addition to our service offerings enthusiastically.

And the reasons for this are obvious: whereas in the past it used to take phone calls to inquire about patients' coverage and remaining benefit levels, dentists and their office staff can now log-on and have this information in a matter of minutes. In today's fast-paced dental office environment, eliminating the need for time-intensive telephone inquiries can add significantly to an office's bottom line.

This is not only a great benefit to dentists who are trying to find new ways to optimize their office efficiency, it also benefits your employees in a profound way.

By giving dentists immediate access to their patients' coverage information, office visits will be quicker and smoother for your employees.

By providing your employees with effective and hassle-free dental coverage, you can look forward to greater employee satisfaction and a happier, more productive workforce. Comprehensive online services are the way of the future, and they have already arrived at Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts.



Delta Dental Exceeds Performance Goals

Providing our accounts with the highest possible level of customer service and accuracy is always our utmost goal, and we set very high standards for ourselves.

Throughout the year, we monitor our performance levels and are pleased to report that we have so far exceeded our 2002 goals.*

Category	2002 Goal	2002 YTD
Enrollment Accuracy	99%	99.9%
Financial Accuracy	99.6%	99.8%
Processing Accuracy	98%	98.9%
Call Monitoring Accuracy	98%	98.8%
Call Access Rate	95%	96.3%

*Based on October 2002 data.

MarketPlace News

New Privacy Rules

The Bush administration finalized rules on medical privacy. The new regulations allow individuals to find out who has reviewed their records and seek penalties against anyone who misuses the information. The rules prohibit the sale of patient names or health information to third parties for marketing purposes. The final rules exclude a proposed requirement that patients give written permission before medical information may be reviewed. Patient advocates are against this.

(BenefitNews Connect, August 2002)

Online Enrollment

In 2001, 70% of employees in large corporations enrolled for benefits online—up from 51% in 2000. Eight percent used an interactive voice response system, and 22% used a call center.

(Employee Benefit Plan Review, April 2002, Hewitt Associates Survey)

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Advice from Delta Dental's Director of Disease Management

Please share this important information with your employees—it will help them keep their families healthy

How to Pick a Dentist That's Right For You



Delta Dental's Dr. Compton

Your relationship with your dentist is very important, and you'll want to find a dentist who makes you feel comfortable and with whom you can openly discuss your oral health concerns.

Because you never know when you might have a dental emergency, it's important to begin building a relationship with a dentist now so you'll be prepared if you need urgent dental care.

It's also a good idea to contact a few dental offices to determine with which you feel most comfortable. Ask the following questions:

- ◆ What are the office hours? (You want to be sure the office is open at times that suit your schedule.)
- ◆ How does your office handle dental emergencies?
- ◆ Do you explain dental procedures and the associated costs before providing the service?

- ◆ What is your approach to providing dental care—are you proactive or more conservative in your treatment?
- ◆ Do you provide dental health education tips and training on personal oral health care?
- ◆ Do you screen for oral cancer and other diseases?

For good sources for dentists' names and business locations, you can:

- ◆ Search Delta's on-line dentist directories (which list participating dentists through www.deltamass.com)
- ◆ Contact your state's dental society for referrals.
- ◆ Ask your friends and family which dentists they use, and whether they are satisfied.
- ◆ You may also check with the Division of Professional Licensure to see if a dentist holds a current license and if he/she had any disciplinary actions in the past. Go to <http://www.state.ma.us/reg/consumer.htm> and click on the Check a License link.

And so you'll enjoy the greatest value from your Delta Dental plan, ask the dentist if he or she participates in the Delta Dental plan to which you belong.