



# Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Report

A Report on the Oral Health of Illinois' Children



# Shining a Spotlight on the Oral Health of Illinois Children

As the leading dental benefits provider in Illinois, Delta Dental of Illinois covers nearly 1 million smiles across the state. We know first-hand the importance of oral health, especially for Illinois' youngest residents.

That's why we commissioned the fifth biennial Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey, a state public opinion poll designed to shine a spotlight on the importance of children's oral health. Working with Kelton, a leading global insights firm, we surveyed 155 parents of children ages 12 and under in Illinois. This sample size yields a margin of error of  $\pm 7.9$  percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

We asked Illinois parents about their opinions and their children's oral health habits. We explored topics both serious and light-hearted. And now, we have summarized the results to help educate and improve the oral health of Illinois families.

Here are the key findings:

1

Parents are struggling to keep their children's oral health on track.

2

Illinois children's dental habits, including brushing and flossing, could be improved.

3

Oral health issues and educational opportunities persist today.

# Kids' Oral Health Isn't Making the Grade



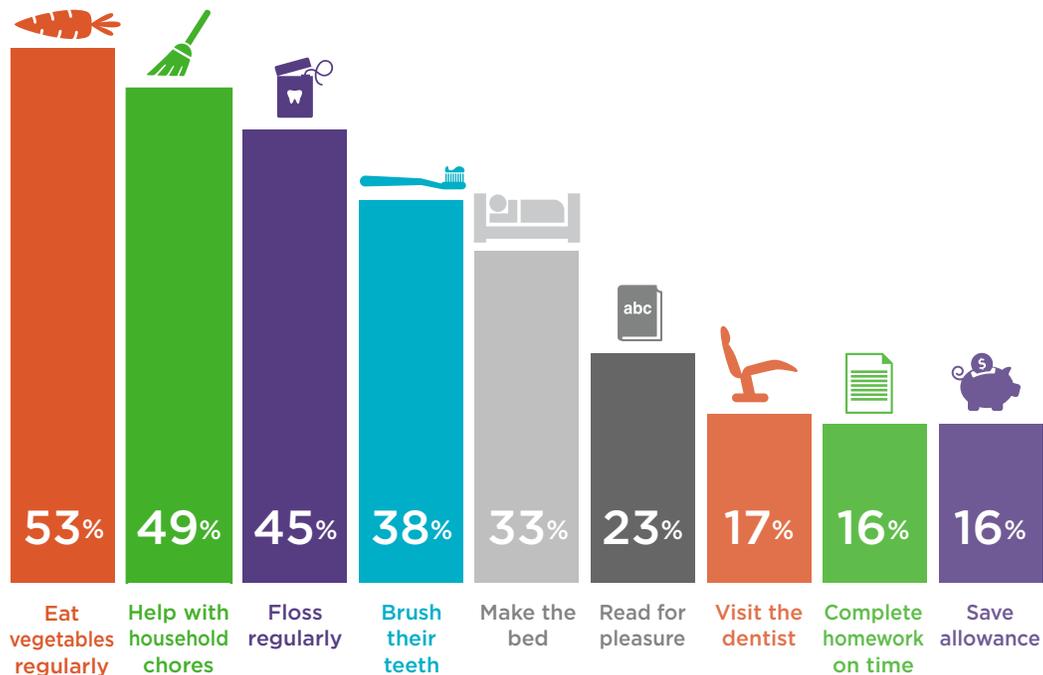
Only 32 percent of Illinois parents would give their kids an “A” grade for oral health. In fact, only 2 of 10 Illinois parents (20 percent) say their children’s oral health is as good as it could be.

## Grade Given for Children’s Oral Health

<b>A</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>1%</b>

Parents say their children’s oral health isn’t as good as it could be because their teeth aren’t brushed or flossed often enough. It’s not surprising that parents also report that some of the most challenging things to get their children to do are brush (38 percent) and floss (45 percent) regularly.

## Most Challenging Things to Get Children to Do (Multiple Answers)

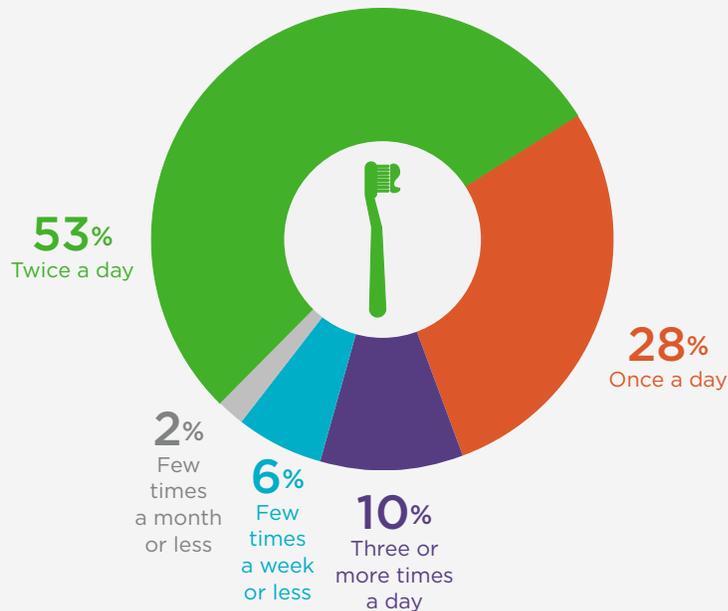


# Kids' Brushing and Flossing Habits

Illinois kids' brushing and flossing habits could use some improvement. More than one-third (36 percent) of parents admits their children's teeth are brushed only once a day or less often.

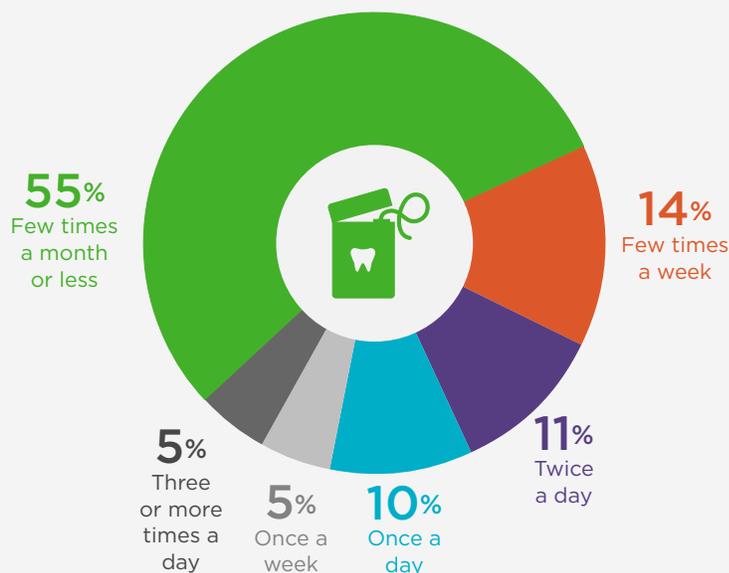


## How Often Children's Teeth Are Brushed



Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of parents don't replace their child's toothbrush as **often** as recommended - which is at least every three months.

## How Often Children's Teeth Are Flossed



Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of parents report that their children's teeth are flossed **less often** than once a day.

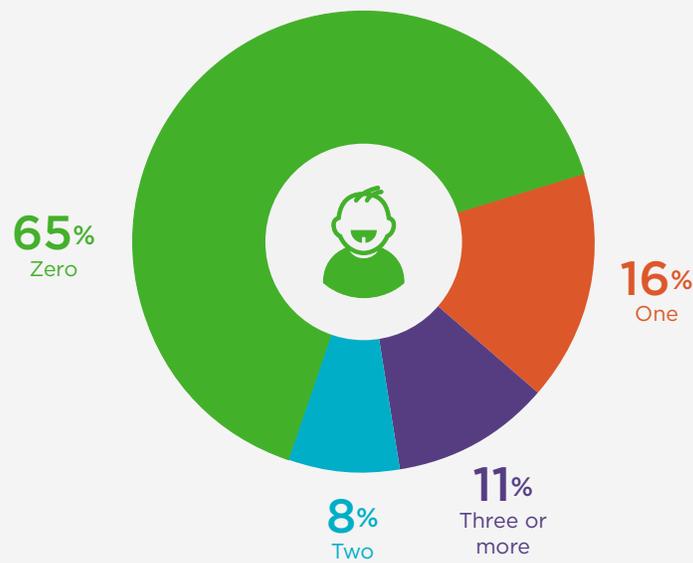
# Bad Habits Could Lead to Decay

Tooth decay can develop any time after the first tooth comes in, starting around 6 months old, and good oral health habits should begin even earlier. Before a child gets the first tooth, parents should wipe the gums with a damp washcloth after meals. As soon as a child's first tooth comes in, it should be brushed.



According to our Children's Oral Health Survey, poor oral health habits for Illinois children of all ages could be contributing to tooth decay. In fact, 35 percent of children had at least one cavity in the past 12 months.

## Number of Cavities in Past 12 Months



## Brushing for Babies to Big Kids

As soon as the first tooth appears, begin brushing with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush with a smear of fluoride toothpaste at least once a day, preferably before bedtime.



By the time children are 2, or by the time they can spit, start using a pea-sized dab of fluoride toothpaste. Be sure to train children to spit out the toothpaste and rinse afterward. Help children brush properly twice a day.

Parents should help brush and floss - or at least supervise - until age 7 or 8 or until children can properly care for teeth alone.



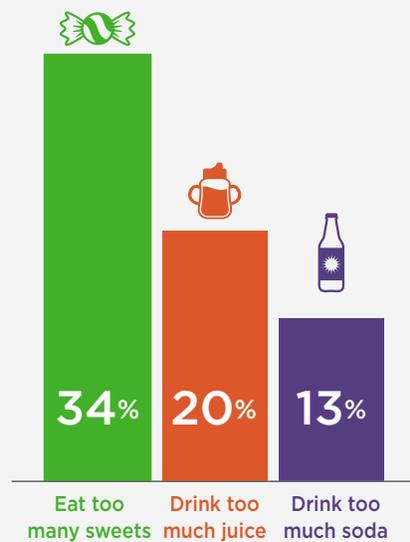
# Everyday Habits Contribute to Cavities, Too



Poor brushing and flossing habits can certainly lead to cavities – but parents also admit there are other everyday habits that keep kids from achieving good oral health – like eating sweets and drinking too much juice.

## Reasons Oral Health Isn't as Good as It Could Be

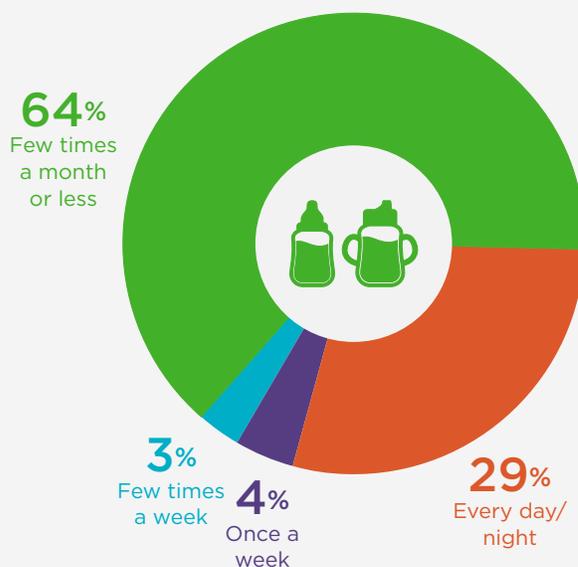
(Multiple responses of parents who say oral health isn't as good as it could be)



Along with top-of-mind oral care like healthy eating and drinking, there are some other everyday habits that parents might not think about contributing to children's tooth decay.

For instance, many parents don't know that children shouldn't be put to bed with a bottle or sippy cup, unless it contains water. But, 36 percent of parents with children under age 3 put their child down for a nap or bedtime with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice at least once a week or more.

## How Often Child Naps/Goes to Bed with Milk or Juice

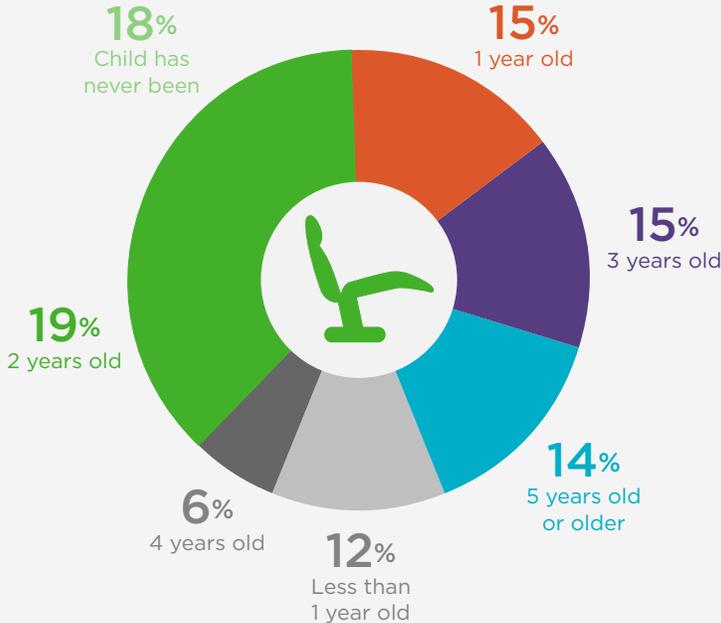


# Dental Visits Are Important... From Age 1



Regular dental visits are vital to good oral health and a habit that should start no later than a child's first birthday. Yet, most Illinois children don't see their family dentist until they are 2 1/2 years old or older.

## Age of Child's First Dental Visit

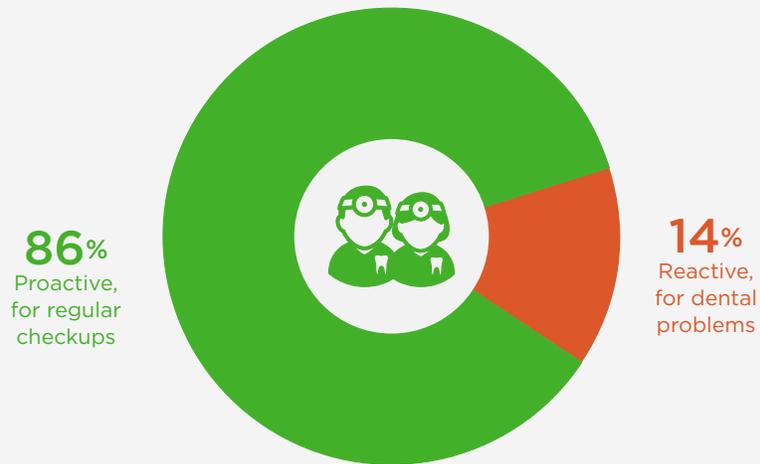


The good news is that of children who have seen the dentist, 97 percent visited at least once in the past year.

# Dental Visits Are Important... From Age 1



## Reason for Children's Dental Visits



## What to Expect at Your Child's First Visit

At the first checkup, the dentist will:

- Assess your child's risk for early dental decay
- Demonstrate brushing and flossing techniques
- Discuss diet and feeding practices that put your child at risk for decay
- Discuss the use of topical fluoride
- Assess your child's bite, facial growth and development
- Provide information for trauma prevention as your child goes through stages of development

# Good Oral Health Care is Essential for Mother and Baby



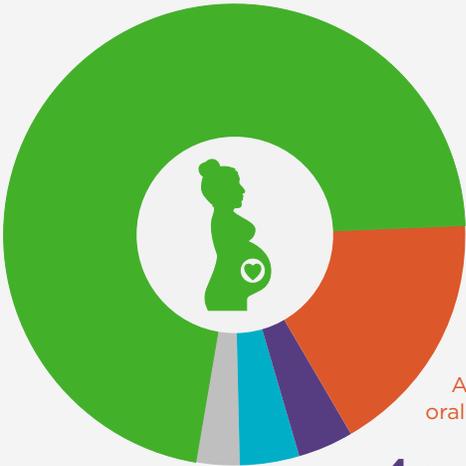
Oral health may not be top of mind for women when preparing for a new baby, but a visit to the dentist can help identify key health issues appearing specifically during pregnancy and provide the opportunity to ask important questions.

However, 37 percent of expecting mothers neglected to visit a dentist during pregnancy. Among those who visited, 71 percent went because they already had a checkup on the calendar.

## Reason for Dental Visits While Pregnant

(of those who visited the dentist while pregnant)

**71%**  
Routine checkup



**17%**  
Address an oral health issue

**4%** Discuss oral health needs while pregnant  
**4%** Discuss an oral health issue from their pregnancy  
**3%** Other

# Good Oral Health Care is Essential for Mother and Baby



## Questions for Expecting Mothers to Address with the Dentist

### Why do my gums bleed more easily?

Hormonal changes during pregnancy can exaggerate the way gum tissue reacts to plaque, increasing the risk for pregnancy gingivitis. To help, floss once daily and brush twice daily, paying close attention to cleaning along and just below the gum line.



### Can I receive routine or emergency dental care during my pregnancy?

Yes, it's important to get an examination and cleaning during the first trimester so a dentist can check for any issues and assess how often visits will be necessary.



### What is the red lump that has developed along my gum line?

Pregnancy tumors are somewhat rare red growths of gum tissue that can form on the gums between the teeth as a result of excess plaque. These are benign and harmless, and usually subside after the baby is born.



# Dental Health is Affecting Kids in the Classroom



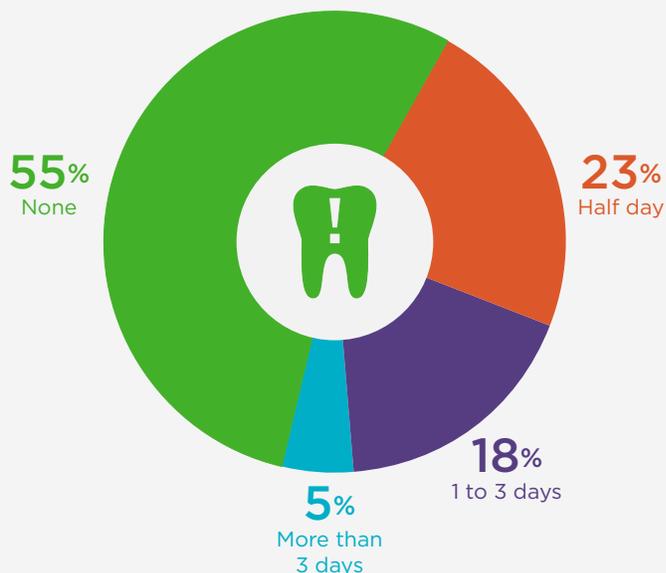
Nearly half (46 percent) of parents said their children between the ages of 6 and 12 had to miss school due to an oral health problem in the past 12 months.

Poor oral health is a real distraction and can cause children to have a difficult time participating or concentrating in school. When a child has serious tooth decay, it can affect overall health and can lead to problems eating, speaking and learning.

Some states recognize the connection between good oral health and learning and require that children see a dentist before completing certain school grades. It's important for parents to schedule a dental visit at back-to-school time to check for any oral health problems before the school year begins.

## School Days Missed Due to Oral Health Problems

(6-12 years)



# Keep Smiling, Kids

According to the Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey, when asked what kids are most proud of, 61 percent of Illinoisan parents said their smiles. The fact that the majority of Illinois children are proud of their smiles is a good sign, and Delta Dental of Illinois is committed to providing access to great oral health care and education so Illinois kids can continue to feel good about their own personal smiles.

For more resources on children's oral health, visit [YourOralHealthHub.com](http://YourOralHealthHub.com).



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