

Good Dental Health Makes Good Business Sense: Fast Facts for Employers About Preventative Dental Health Care

Contributed by Hilary Kleese, Marketing Director, First Choice Dental Group

In today's tough economy and with rising health care costs, we all face ongoing pressure to control costs, identify what coverage is essential and see where there may be opportunities to trim costs. Research shows that oral health is integral to overall health. It's becoming more apparent that dental health coverage and promoting a message of dental wellness is essential to helping your employees be healthy, happy and productive. Consider these statistics:

- More than 90% of all systemic diseases, including diabetes, leukemia, cancer, heart disease and kidney disease, have oral characteristics that can be detected during an oral exam.
- Oral health issues are a common reason for lost productivity and increased health care costs. Neglected oral health can lead to physical consequences that negatively influence an employee's overall quality of life and productivity at work.
- The Surgeon General reports that 51 million school hours are missed each year because of dental-related illnesses. (When kids miss school, parents miss work.)
- The Surgeon General also reports that more than 164 million work hours are lost each year because of dental problems, not including hours missed to care for children impacted by dental health issues.

Source: *Delta Dental reporting of Taylor Nelson/Sofres Intersearch survey 2002 and Academy of General Dentistry's Know Your Teeth report October 2008*

Specifically in greater Madison, the single biggest health-related cause of student absenteeism in Dane County schools was not the common cold, the flu, or migraines; it was dental neglect, according to data in 2004 from the Dane County Department of Human Services, Public Health Division.

There's a direct link between oral and overall health. Specifically, there is an association between periodontal diseases and diabetes, cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease. The mouth is a window into your overall health, and good oral care is a precursor to good overall health care.

Five Things You Can Do to Promote Dental Wellness in Your Company:

1. **Include adequate dental coverage as part of your overall health coverage** offering for employees
2. **Consider incenting regular routine dental checkups.** As the old adage goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is as true for dental health as it is for overall health. Consider offering gifts or incentives when employees demonstrate a pattern of good dental wellness, with regular dental checkups. Several Madison companies, including Electronic Theatre Controls, already do this and have had good success.
3. **Include Dental Wellness messages in your overall wellness efforts.** There's an oral health aspect of most wellness messages. Nutrition has a dental health aspect to it. Heart health and dental health are integrally linked. Healthy smiles are an essential part of being overall healthy for kids. And certain groups have special oral health concerns, such as expectant moms, those with diabetes or systemic health issues and older adults. Dental wellness is an essential part of overall wellness.
4. **Find a Partner who can help.** Chances are, you're not a dental expert, and you don't have unlimited time to research and understand dental content. But there are local dentists who are committed to spreading the message of dental wellness. They can offer free content and assistance that's relevant regardless of where your employees seek dental care. Dr. Rob Bradley, one of the dentists at First Choice Dental Group, says, "Part of our commitment to helping people throughout greater Madison have healthier smiles is supporting Madison employers in sharing the message of dental wellness with employees. We offer these educational services for free. It's part

of our effort to get more people to take better care of their smiles. We love to visit companies for lunch and learns, health fairs and other events.”

5. **Make smile-friendly practices a habit at your company.** Encouraging and promoting things like good nutrition, decreased soda consumption, drinking more water, tobacco cessation, as well as regular preventative dental and overall health care visits are good for your smiles as well as for your body!

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