



California Dental Hygienists' Association
The Voice of Dental Hygiene

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Media Contact:

Stevan Allen – 916.448.1336

stevan@allenstrategic.com

**CALIFORNIA DENTAL HYGIENISTS SAY NATIONAL CHILDREN'S
DENTAL HEALTH MONTH SHOULD BE A YEARLONG EFFORT**

*California Dental Hygienists' Association Conducts Statewide Outreach
Efforts to Provide Low-Income Children Access to Dental Care*

GLENDAL, Calif. (Feb. 25, 2010) – As National Children's Dental Health Month draws to a close, California's dental hygienists are reminding parents and guardians that protecting the smiles of California's youngest children is a year-round commitment.

"Taking a month to spotlight this issue is a wonderful opportunity to better educate parents and the public," said Daphne Von Essen, president of the [California Dental Hygienists' Association](#) (CDHA). "But this really needs to be something we as a society focus on 365 days a year because we have millions of California children suffering from insufficient oral health care."

The most vulnerable Californians are children in low-income families who have limited access to dental care, lack of dental education and nutritional needs – all of which result in a high cavity rate in children. The greatest racial and ethnic disparity is seen among children ages two through eight, especially in Hispanic, African American and rural communities.

[Early Childhood Caries \(ECC\)](#), a distinctive pattern of severe tooth decay in infants and young children, is one of the most common diseases in this age group. By conservative estimates, it affects more than one out of seven preschoolers and over half of California's elementary school children.

"Poor oral health not only results in cavities but sets in motion the potential for long-term health risks," said Von Essen. Poor oral health has been associated with heart disease, diabetes, potential strokes, along with low birth weight and preterm deliveries. Oral health problems can also lead to pain, poor nutrition and

development, impaired speech, loss of employment, time away from school, and low self-esteem.

To combat these problems, CDHA reminds parents, guardians and caregivers to observe a few simple rules:

- Make sure your child has a dental visit by his or her first birthday
- Children should not fall asleep with a bottle containing anything other than water
- Avoid letting children drink juice from a bottle
- At birth, starting cleaning your child's gums with a soft infant toothbrush or washcloth and water

During National Children's Dental Health Month, hundreds of dental hygienists throughout California have participated in community outreach programs in concert with local departments of public health, Head Start programs, school districts, dental and dental hygiene schools, and Boys & Girls Clubs.

Year round, dental hygienists conduct patient and community education to help reduce tooth decay. In fact, dental hygienists are working to improve access to care for all underserved populations – a reality made possible as hygienists with additional education and licensing conduct oral health screenings, periodontal exams and treatment in non-traditional dental office settings.

CDHA continues to advocate for laws and regulations in Sacramento that will continue to foster the ability of Registered Dental Hygienists to increase access to care for underserved areas.

"Tooth decay is the most common disease for children," said CDHA's Von Essen. "And all it takes is a little education and a toothbrush to combat it."

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The California Dental Hygienists' Association (CDHA) is the authoritative voice of the state's dental hygiene profession. The organization was established 20 years ago when two regional associations merged to form a unified professional group. CDHA represents thousands of dental hygienists throughout the state and is dedicated to expanding opportunities for the profession and access to care for all Californians. For more information, visit www.cdha.org