



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 brand of dental coverage in the United States, Delta Dental of Illinois covers nearly 2 million smiles nationwide. We know first-hand the importance of oral health, especially for Illinois' youngest residents.

That's why we commissioned the fourth 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 231 parents of children ages 12 and under in Illinois. This sample size yields a margin of error of ± 6.5 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 Shows Room for Improvement



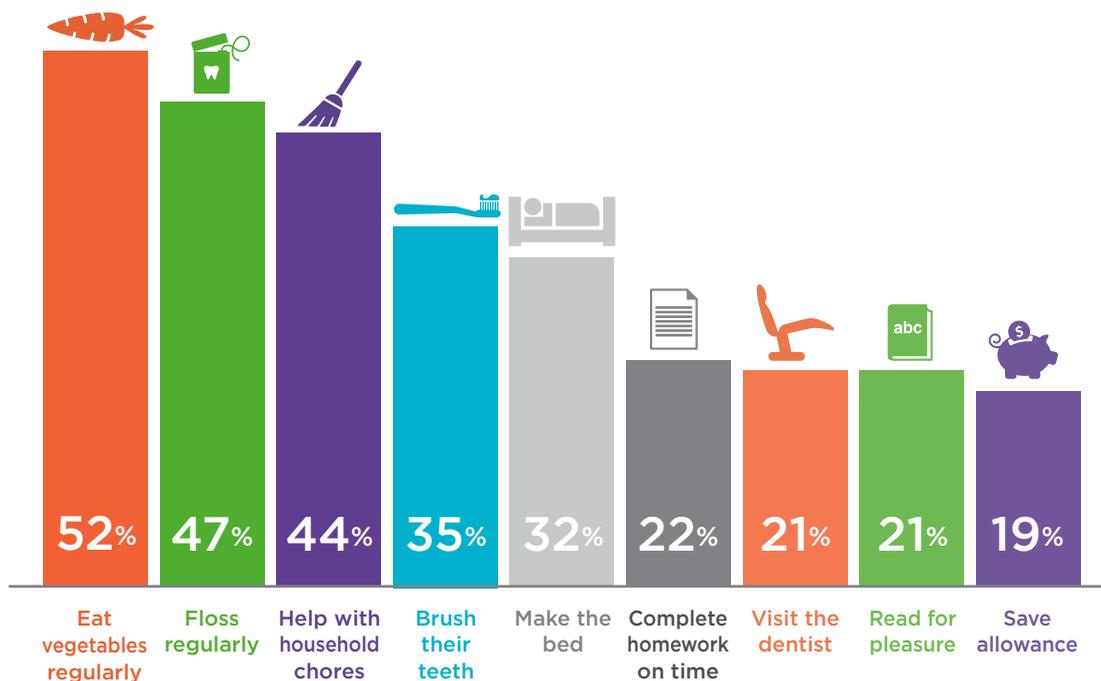
Only 30 percent of Illinois parents would give their kids an “A” grade for oral health. In fact, when asked if their children’s oral health is as good as it could be, only 15 percent of parents said yes.

Grade Given for Children’s Oral Health

A	30%
B	53%
C	14%
D	2%
F	1%

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 floss (47 percent) and brush (35 percent) regularly.

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

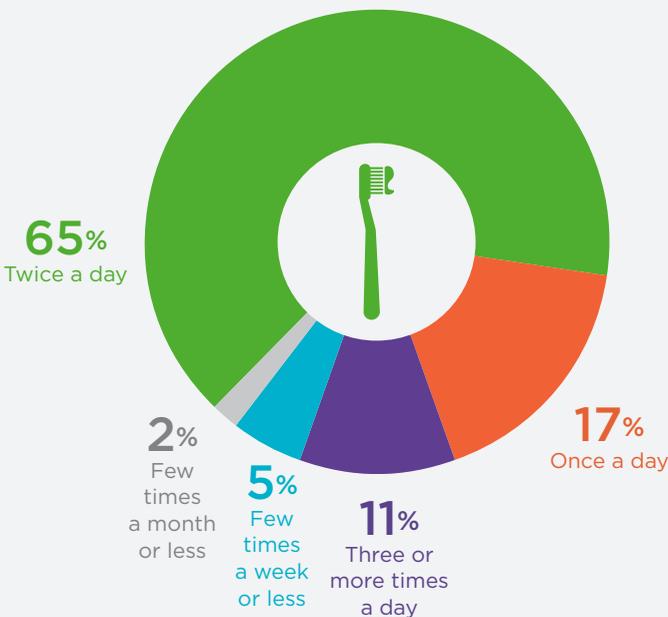


Kids' Brushing and Flossing Habits

Although Illinois children are brushing and flossing more frequently than they were in 2013, there are still improvements to be made. Almost a quarter (24 percent) of parents admit their children's teeth are brushed only once a day or less often. And more than a third (34 percent) are brushing their children's teeth for less than two minutes.



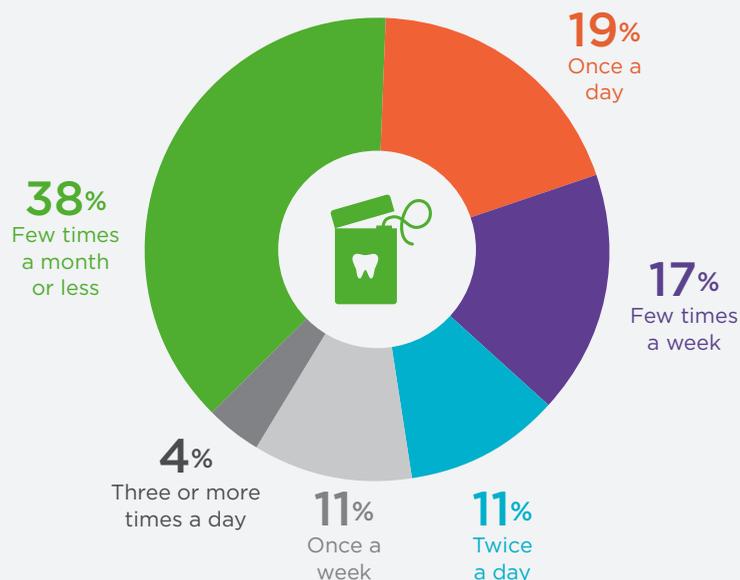
How Often Children's Teeth Are Brushed



Some parents say their children's teeth **aren't** brushed in the morning (12 percent) or at bedtime (15 percent).



How Often Children's Teeth Are Flossed



A majority (66 percent) of parents report that their children's teeth are flossed **less often** than once a day.

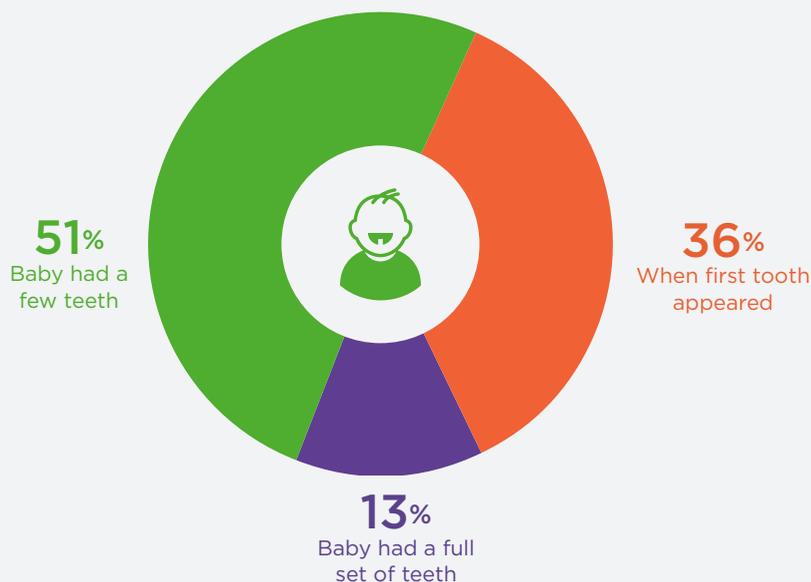
Brushing Begins with Baby's First Tooth



Illinois parents may be contributing to their children's poor habits long before they can brush or floss on their own. 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.

Even 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. But 64 percent of Illinois parents didn't begin brushing for their children at this time. Instead, they waited until there were a few or even a full set of teeth.

When Baby Teeth Were First Brushed



Brushing for Babies to Big Kids

As soon as the first tooth appears, begin brushing with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and water 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.

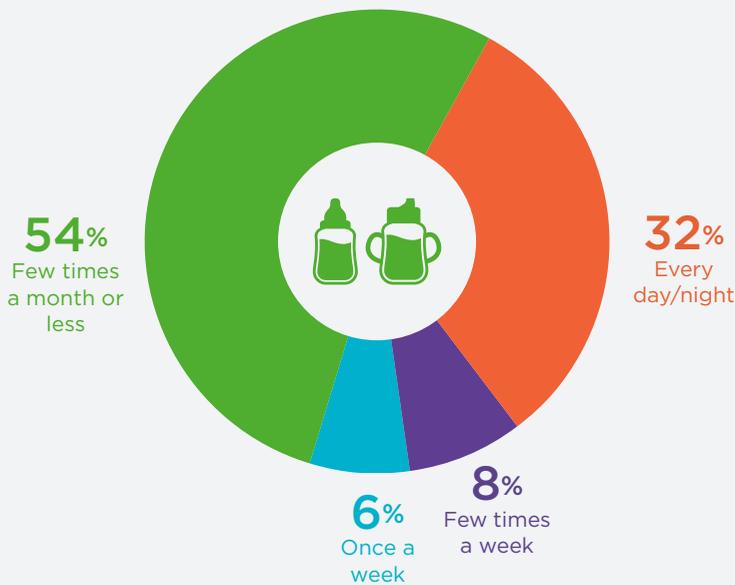


Everyday Habits Contribute to Children's Tooth Decay



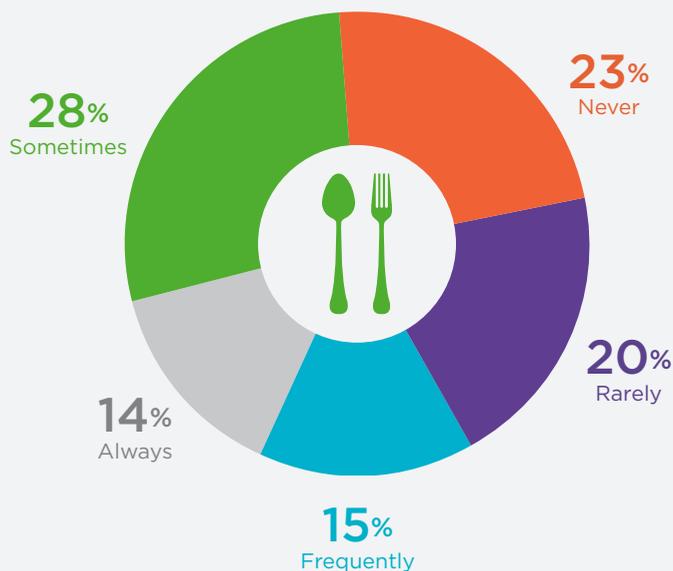
Along with top-of-mind oral health care like brushing and flossing, there are some everyday habits that parents might not realize can contribute to children's tooth decay.

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



Many parents don't know that children shouldn't be put to bed with a bottle or sippy cup, unless it contains water. But, 46 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 Utensils Are Shared (Children Under Age 3)



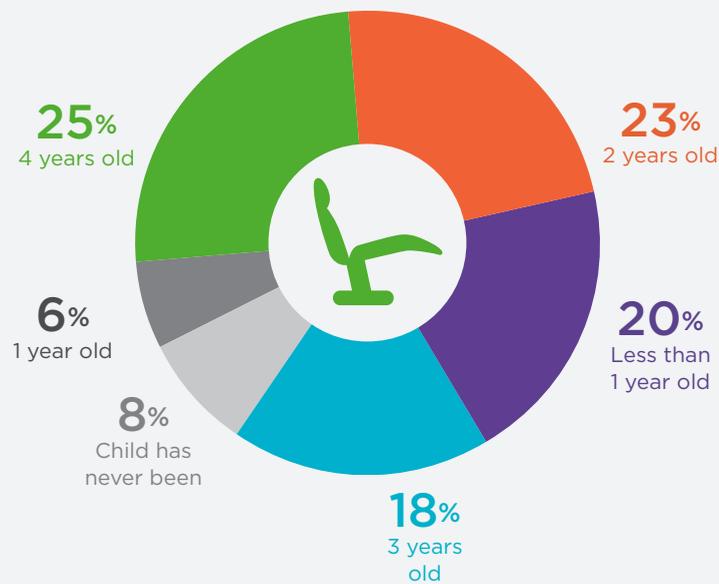
Although sharing utensils while eating can pass along harmful bacteria, a majority (77 percent) of parents with children under age 3 **have used** the same silverware as their kids.

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 age 3 or older.

Age of Child's First Dental Visit



When children visit the dentist from a young age, it helps them establish a relationship with the dentist and feel more comfortable. Children typically aren't visiting until later than recommended, and parents report that more than half (52 percent) of Illinois children are actually nervous to sit in a dentist's chair.

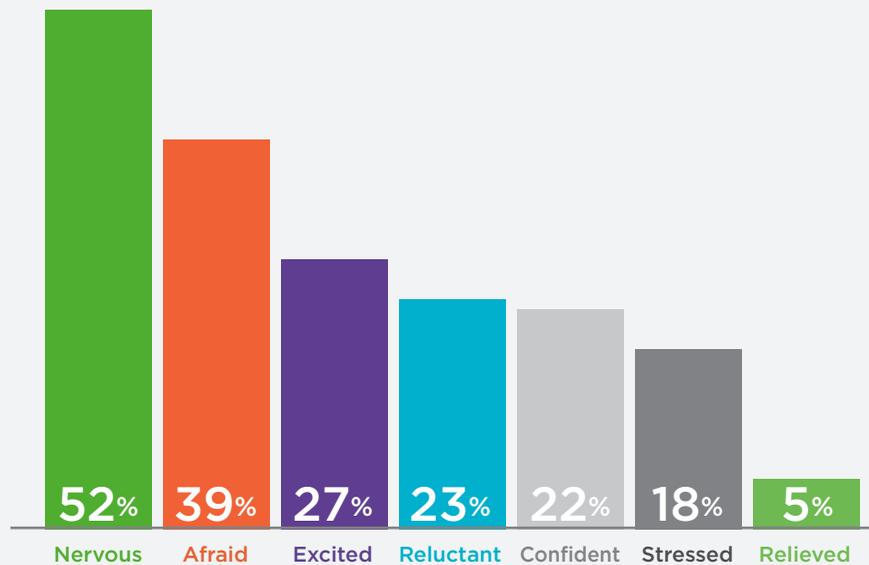
Dental Visits Are Important... From Age 1



How Child Feels About Dental Visits

(Multiple Answers)

Luckily, despite their anxiety, 94 percent of children still visit the dentist at least once a year. And only 17 percent of parents are taking their children to the dentist just because they are experiencing a specific dental problem.



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

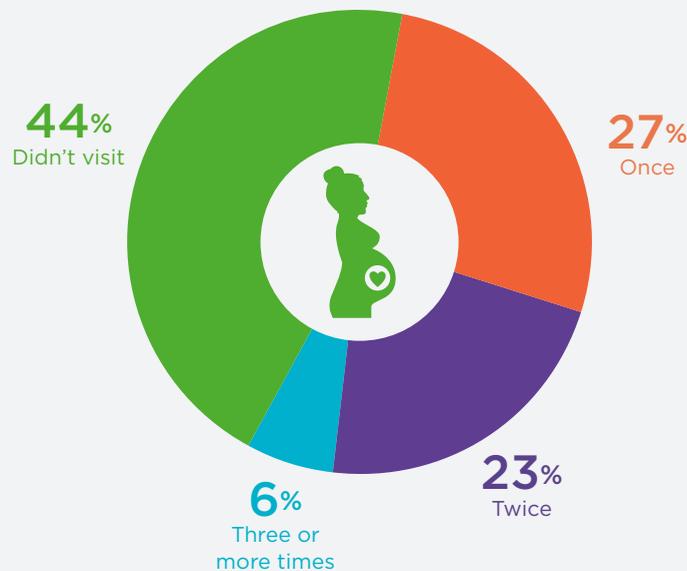
Good Oral Health Care is Essential for Mother and Baby



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, 44 percent of expecting mothers neglected to visit a dentist during pregnancy. Among those who visited, most (80 percent) only went because they already had a checkup on the calendar, not because they wanted to ensure they had good oral health for themselves and their babies.

How Often Expecting Women Visit the Dentist



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.



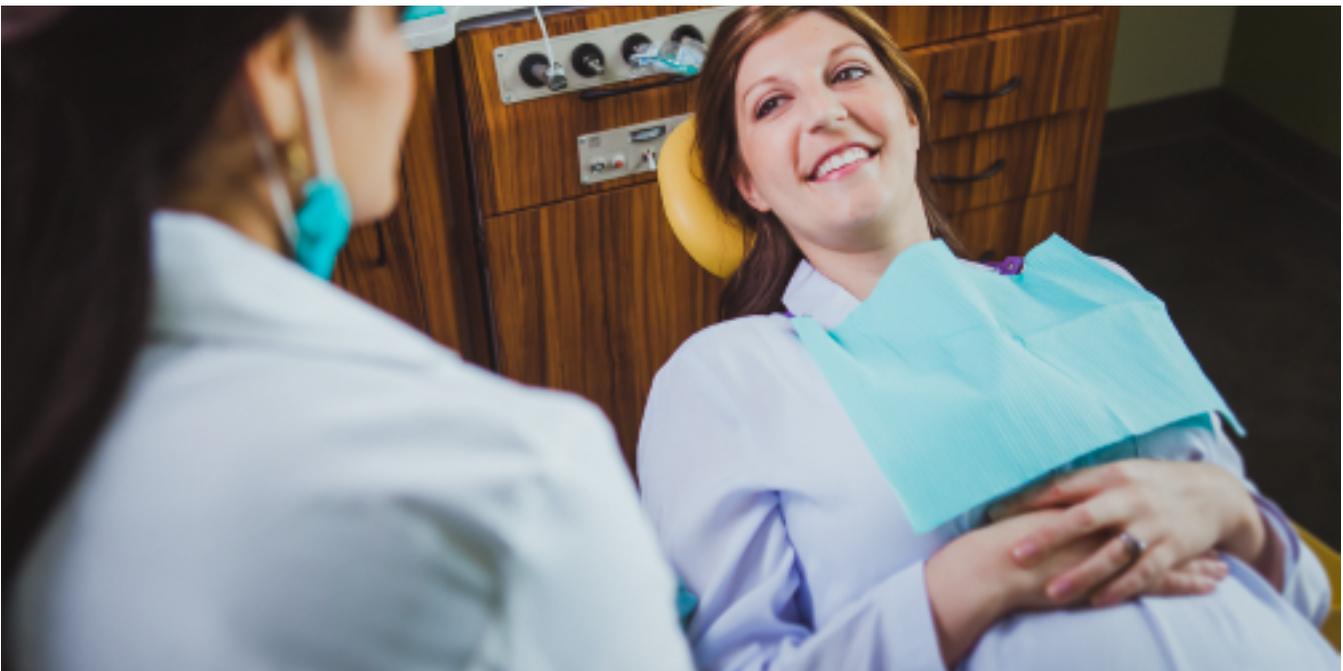
Can I receive routine or emergency dental care during my pregnancy?

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

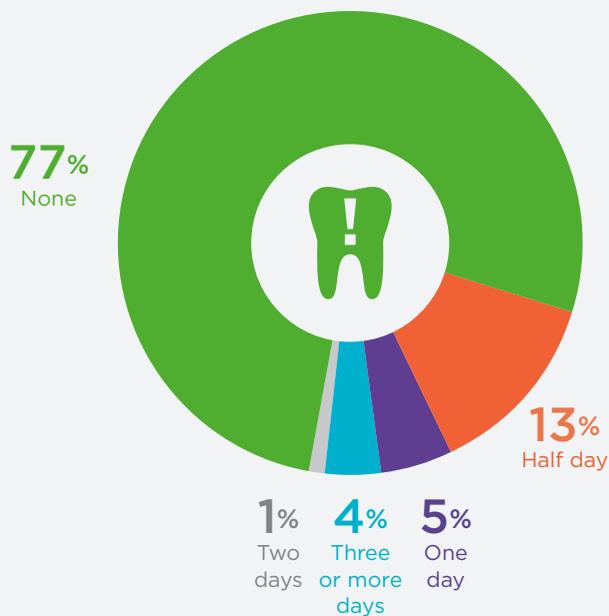


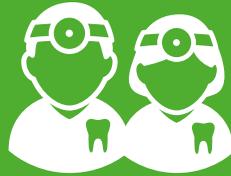
Twenty-three percent of parents said their children between the ages of 6 and 12 had to miss school due to an oral health problem.

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.

Illinois recognizes the connection between good oral health and learning and requires 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 Missed Due to Oral Health Problems





Dentists Are the Most Trusted Resource

According to the Delta Dental of Illinois Children's Oral Health Survey, parents are most likely to seek information on children's oral health from their child's dentist or dental hygienist. Furthermore, 48 percent have taken their child to a dentist and 31 percent have asked their dentist for advice lately in a specific effort to improve their children's oral health.

Delta Dental of Illinois is committed to providing access to more dentists than any other dental benefits carrier so Illinoisans can continue to choose the most trusted resource for their families.

For more resources on children's oral health, visit YourOralHealthHub.com.



Smart plans for smart mouths.