



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Oral Piercings Pose Potential Health Care Risks

Roanoke, VA – July 9, 2009 -- Like clothing and hairstyles, oral piercings give teens and adults a way to express themselves. While trendy, this fashion statement poses a number of potential oral and overall health care risks. It's also important to note that oral piercings most commonly involve the tongue, and also the lips, cheeks, uvula or a combination of sites. Oral piercings have been implicated in a number of adverse oral and systemic conditions.

“Anyone considering an oral piercing should consult a dentist to discuss the possible adverse effects,” says Dr. George Koumaras, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Virginia, “or if you already have an oral piercing, make sure to schedule routine dental exams so a dentist can check for potential problems.”

Known complications of oral piercings include:

- **Pain** – People who have oral piercings cite pain as the first thing they notice after the procedure.
- **Swelling** – Piercing may cause swelling of the tongue. According to the American Dental Association, in extreme cases, a severely swollen tongue can actually close off the airway and restrict breathing.
- **Prolonged bleeding** – A blood vessel punctured during piercing may cause severe bleeding.
- **Damage to the sublingual salivary glands** - An improperly placed tongue piercing may damage the sublingual salivary glands (salivary glands under the tongue), which produce five percent of saliva entering the oral cavity.
- **Aspiration (choking)** - Jewelry may become loose in the mouth, creating a choking hazard.
- **Plaque buildup** – Plaque may build up on piercings, requiring more frequent cleanings.

- **Damage to the teeth and gums** - Jewelry may come in contact with both the teeth and gums, causing chipped or cracked teeth or gingival (gum) recession.
- **Allergic reaction** – Jewelry containing certain metals may cause an allergic reaction.
- **Nerve damage** – A piercing that penetrates a nerve may cause nerve damage, leading to numbness or loss of sensation at the piercing site.
- **Infection** – The wound from the piercing, coupled with bacteria in the mouth, creates an increased risk of infection.

“If you decide to get an oral piercing and complications arise, schedule an appointment with your dentist,” says Dr. Koumaras. “Dentists are trained to monitor and manage oral health problems and will work with a physician to manage more serious conditions.”

Also, make sure to follow any home-care instructions, including cleaning, provided by your dentist or piercing specialist. This may help prevent immediate, short-term or long-term complications. Your dentist can prescribe an antimicrobial rinse to help keep the pierced site and jewelry clean.

“Whether a piercing is through the cheek, lip or tongue, proper oral hygiene measures are critical,” continues Dr. Koumaras, “and may help reduce the risk of some damaging adverse effects of oral piercing.”

About Delta Dental of Virginia

Delta Dental of Virginia, headquartered in Roanoke, was created in 1964 by the Virginia Dental Association and chartered by the General Assembly, as a not-for-profit service corporation the same year. Delta Dental provides employee dental benefits through a variety of managed fee-for-service and PPO plans covering over 1.3 million enrollees in over 3,100 groups. Delta Dental of Virginia is a member company of the Delta Dental Plans Association, the nation’s largest, most experienced dental benefits carrier providing dental coverage to over 51.6 million people in over 93,000 groups across the nation.

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