



# Impressions

Issue 13

Stay Connected to the Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services

Summer 2024

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## Celebrate International Self-Care Day by Prioritizing Oral Health

July 24, 2024 is designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as [International Self-Care Day](#). This symbolic day emphasizes that self-care can be practiced “24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” highlighting the importance of integrating self-care into our daily routines. This year’s Self-Care Day is particularly significant as it marks the fifth anniversary of the first global [WHO guidelines on self-care interventions for health and well-being](#).

The Recognition of International



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Self-Care Day provides an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about self-care and its interventions; recognize the benefits self-care brings to people’s lives and the progress achieved so far; and call for renewed commitments and actions to expand health systems to include self-care interventions.

There are two main components to self-care: self-care actions and self-care interventions.

### Self-Care Actions

Self-care actions are habits, practices, and lifestyle choices that help us look after ourselves and lead healthier lives. These include:

- Regular physical activity: Exercise benefits our hearts, minds, and bodies, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, and enhancing cognitive functions.

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## Smile Checks for Success: Delaware Mandates Kindergarten Dental Screenings Beginning Fall 2024

The Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services will begin kindergarten dental screenings this fall for the 2024-2025 school year. This initiative is mandated by the recently passed House Bill 83, which requires every public and charter school to provide oral health screenings for kindergarten students by the last attendance day of each school year. Parents or guardians will be notified of the results, and referrals to dentists will be provided if needed.

This mandate is crucial for children in Delaware as it ensures early detection of oral health issues, promoting better overall health and academic performance. Early screenings can prevent more severe dental problems, reduce absenteeism, and foster lifelong oral health habits.



# Beat the Heat – and Cavities – by Drinking from the Tap!

As temperatures soar during this summer’s heat waves, it’s more important than ever to stay hydrated. Drinking water is essential for your health, and it has an added bonus – it’s great for your teeth! Water is by far the healthiest option available. Our bodies are made of 60% water, and staying hydrated helps your system distribute healthy nutrients, get rid of waste, give your skin a healthy glow, and keep your muscles moving.

But did you know that drinking tap water, especially when it’s fluoridated, can also help keep your teeth healthy?

## Much of Delaware’s Public Water Supply is Fluoridated



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Fluoride, often called “nature’s cavity fighter,” is one of the easiest and most beneficial things you can use to help prevent cavities. Fluoride is a mineral that strengthens teeth, helping to prevent, and in some cases, even reverse cavities. Most local tap water supplies include fluoride, which is endorsed by the American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, and the CDC as one of the top 10 public health measures of the 20th century. To check if your water source is fluoridated, [visit this CDC resource for more information](#)

## It Washes Your Teeth While You Drink

Water is great at whisking away leftover food and residue that can lead to cavities. It also dilutes the acids produced by the bacteria in your mouth. On the contrary, drinking juice, soda, or sports drinks leave unwanted sugar behind and can damage teeth if acidic.

## It Helps Combat Dry Mouth

Saliva is 99% water. When you are low on saliva, you experience dry mouth – a condition that makes it hard to swallow and chew. Saliva is your mouth’s first defense against tooth decay. When your saliva supply runs low, dry mouth puts you at an increased risk for tooth decay. By drinking enough water, you help keep your mouth moist and clean.

## It Has Zero Calories

The growing consumption of sugary beverages has significantly contributed to the rising obesity rates in the United States. Individuals who drink one to two sugary drinks per day are 26% more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. However, this risk can be lessened by replacing soda, sugary juices, and sports drinks with water. Water is always the healthiest choice! Even sodas and juices that boast little to no sugar or calories are not the best for our teeth, as they are usually highly acidic, damaging the outer shell of the tooth called enamel.

## It’s Eco Friendly

Choosing a reusable water bottle is a small change that can make a big difference in protecting our planet. And filling that bottle with water from the tap can make a big difference in protecting your smile! BYOB (bring your own bottle) and fill from the tap!

Remember, fluoridated tap water is one of the easiest and most beneficial things you can drink to prevent cavities and maintain a healthy smile. If you exclusively drink pre-packaged, bottled water from the store, your teeth may be missing out on the benefits of fluoride.

Want to know more? Visit the [CDC’s website about community water fluoridation](#).

## Did You Know?

You’re [more likely](#) to get a serious injury or a tooth knocked out if you’re not wearing a mouth guard during sports and physical activities, (American Dental Association)! Play it safe; wear a mouth guard.

Mouth guards can be purchased at drug stores or custom made by a dentist. Mouth Guards are the Real MVPs! To learn more about mouth guards, visit this [American Dental Association article](#).



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## Celebrate International Self-Care Day by Prioritizing Oral Health – continued from page 1

- **Healthy diet:** Eating a variety of foods, including whole grains, nuts, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and animal sources like meat, fish, eggs, and milk.
- **Mental health care:** Adopting a healthier lifestyle, spending time in nature, talking to loved ones, getting good sleep, managing stress, and seeking help for mental health issues.
- **Eliminating alcohol and tobacco use:** Avoiding these substances improves overall health.

### Self-Care Interventions

Self-care interventions are evidence-based tools that support self-care, such as quality medicines, devices, diagnostics, and digital tools. These tools empower individuals to take an active role in their health care, helping to relieve pressure on health systems.

### Incorporating Good Oral Health into Self-Care

Oral health is a crucial, and sometimes neglected, component of self-care, and there are simple actions to help maintain it. Here are some tips to incorporate good oral health into your self-care routine:

- **Brush twice daily:** Use fluoride toothpaste and brush for at least two minutes each morning and night. Buy a new toothbrush every three to four months.
- **Floss daily:** Clean between your teeth with floss, to remove plaque and food particles and to prevent gingivitis that leads to gum disease and other health problems.
- **Healthy diet:** Limit sugary snacks and drinks

## July is UV Safety Month

July is UV Safety Month – a perfect time to emphasize the importance of protecting your skin and lips from harmful Ultraviolet (UV) rays. While we often focus on skin protection, it's important to remember that oral cancer includes lip cancer and is a serious risk that increases with excessive sun exposure.

Lip cancer occurs when abnormal cells grow out of control, resulting in tumors or lesions on the lips. A type of squamous cell carcinoma, lip cancer can develop on

and consume a balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals. This helps not only your teeth, but your whole body.



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- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water helps wash away food and keeps your mouth and body hydrated.
- **Regular dental check-ups:** Visit your dentist regularly for cleanings and exams to prevent and address any issues early.
- **Use mouth guards:** Protect yourself during sports and other physical activities with a well-fitted mouth guard.
- **Avoid tobacco:** [Quit smoking](#) and avoid using tobacco products, which can cause serious oral health problems.
- **Limit or eliminate alcohol consumption:** Alcohol has a negative impact on both oral health and overall health.

By incorporating these oral health practices into your self-care routine, you can ensure a healthier smile and overall well-being.

This International Self-Care Day, let's commit to taking better care of our oral health. A healthy smile is something to feel good about! Happy Self-Care Day!

either the upper or lower lip, but it's more common on the lower lip. It's the most common type of oral cancer, with 40,000 new cases diagnosed each year ([Cleveland Clinic](#)). Let's dive into how you can protect your lips and stay sun-safe.

### Understanding UV Radiation

UV radiation from the sun is a major cause of skin cancer, and it can also significantly affect your lips. Prolonged exposure to UV rays can damage the delicate skin on your lips, leading to an increased risk of lip cancer. Being mindful of UV safety is essential

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## July is UV Safety Month – continued from page 3

for maintaining both your overall health and your oral health.

### Protecting Your Lips from the Sun

#### Use Lip Balm with SPF

One of the simplest and most effective ways to protect your lips is by using a lip balm that contains SPF (Sun Protection Factor). Look for products with at least an SPF of 30. Apply it generously and reapply every two hours, especially after eating or drinking.

#### Wear a Hat

A wide-brimmed hat can provide shade for your face and lips, reducing direct exposure to UV rays. This is especially important during peak sun hours from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



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Seek shade when-

ever possible to minimize direct sun exposure. This is particularly important during midday when UV rays are the strongest.

#### Avoid Tanning Beds

Tanning beds emit UV radiation that can be even more intense than the sun. Avoid using them to protect your skin and lips from harmful rays.

Check the UV Index: Be aware of the UV index in your area. On days when the index is high, take extra precautions to protect your skin and lips. Even on cloudy

days it is possible to get a sunburn.

### Recognizing the Signs of Lip Cancer

Early detection of lip cancer can significantly improve treatment outcomes. Even if you haven't always practiced sun safety as well as



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you should, you can still be proactive by monitoring for any abnormalities. Here are some signs to watch for:

- Persistent sores or ulcers on the lips that do not heal
- Red or white patches on the lips
- Swelling or lumps on the lips
- Pain, tenderness, or numbness on the lips or in the mouth.

If you notice any of these symptoms, seek evaluation from a dental or health care professional immediately.

This UV Safety Month, take steps to protect your lips and skin from harmful UV rays. By incorporating these simple practices into your daily routine, you can significantly reduce your risk of lip cancer and other sun-related health issues.

Remember, your lips are just as vulnerable to UV damage as the rest of your skin, so make sun protection a priority. Stay safe, stay hydrated, and enjoy the sunshine responsibly! Visit [ProtectYourSkinDE.org](https://ProtectYourSkinDE.org) for more sun safety tips.

## July 21 Marked Zero HIV Stigma Day

### Promoting Health Equity and Oral Health for People Living with HIV/AIDS

July 21 marked Zero HIV Stigma Day, a global initiative dedicated to erasing the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Despite significant advances in treatment and awareness, health equity issues continue, impacting the overall well-being and quality of life for individuals people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). One of those healthy equity issues revolves around oral health. While good oral health is important to the well-being of all population groups, it is especially critical for PLWHA. Poor oral health care can undermine HIV treatment and diminish quality of life, yet many individuals living with HIV are not receiving the necessary oral health care that would optimize their

treatment. Oral health care consistently ranks among the top unmet needs in [Statewide Statement of HIV/AIDS surveys](#).

#### Health Equity Issues for PLWHA

PLWHA continue to face various health equity challenges, including limited access to health care, social stigma, and economic barriers. These challenges can lead to disparities in treatment outcomes and overall health, including oral health. Key issues include access to care, stigma and discrimination, economic barriers, lack of awareness, and fear of breach of confidentiality.

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## July 21 is Zero HIV Stigma Day – continued from page 4

### Access to Care

Many people with HIV struggle to access comprehensive health care services, including dental care. Financial constraints, lack of insurance, lack of transportation, and geographic barriers can limit their ability to receive regular check-ups and necessary treatments.

Increasing access to affordable dental care through expanded insurance coverage and community health programs is essential. Mobile dental clinics and telehealth services can also help reach underserved populations.

### Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma remains a significant barrier to seeking care. Fear of discrimination can deter individuals from visiting health care providers, including dentists, further complicating health issues. Education and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination in health care settings are crucial. Training health care providers to offer compassionate, non-judgmental care can encourage more people to seek the treatment they need.

### Economic Barriers

Economic instability can make it difficult for PLWHA to prioritize oral health care. The cost of dental treatments, even routine cleanings, can be prohibitive. The Department of Health and Human Services provides the primary safety net for oral health care for PLWHA through the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and Medicaid. However, this coverage is limited.

Oral health should be integrated into routine HIV care. Regular dental check-ups should be a standard part of managing HIV, with dentists and doctors working collaboratively to address the specific needs of each patient.

### Lack of Awareness

There is often a lack of awareness among health care providers about the specific oral health needs of people living with HIV. This can result in inadequate or inappropriate care. Oral health problems can significantly compromise HIV-infected individuals' general health and well-being, yet many of them experience an unmet need for oral care.

Providing education and support for PLWHA about the importance of oral health and how to maintain it can empower individuals to take proactive steps in their care. This includes information on proper brushing and flossing techniques, the use of fluoride products, and managing the oral symptoms that come along with the virus.

### Fear of Breach of Confidentiality

A person's HIV Status is Personal Health Information (PHI) and it should remain secure with medical and dental providers. While laws exist to keep PHI protected, fear of this information being shared unlawfully is a legitimate concern that can deter PLWHA from seeking medical and dental care.

[Disclosing one's HIV status is still widely perceived as socially dangerous](#) and inadvertent or improper disclosure of their status can result in denial of employment, violence, and many other collateral consequences.

With stigma, comes fear. If each of us commits to making positive changes in our families and communities, we can help end HIV stigma and work to stop HIV together.

### Overcoming Barriers

Many of these barriers can be addressed and overcome by case management services, but other approaches are needed to address the additional psychological and stigma-related factors that are impeding access to oral health care in this population.



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Zero HIV Stigma Day is a reminder of the ongoing fight against the stigma and inequities faced by people living with HIV/AIDS. By addressing these challenges and focusing on comprehensive care, including oral health, we can improve the quality of life for PLWHA.

To read more about Zero HIV Stigma Day, visit [HIV.gov](https://www.hiv.gov).

# As kids head back to school, **NOW** is the perfect time to protect their smiles!



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**Call to schedule a dental appointment today. A healthy smile should last a lifetime!**

**Looking for a dentist? Call 2-1-1 for information.**

## Follow this oral hygiene checklist



- **Visit the dentist regularly for cleanings and oral exams starting at age 1.**
- ♦ **Brush your teeth after meals or at least twice each day.**
- ♦ **Drink plenty of water.**
- ♦ **Eat a well-balanced diet.**
- ♦ **Limit between-meal snacks.**
- ♦ **Floss daily.**



**DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**  
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