

TRICARE Dental Health Matters



Issue 2: 2006

A PUBLICATION FOR TRICARE DENTAL PROGRAM ENROLLEES

The Dentist is in...

*Air Force Col. Gary Martin, DDS, MPH
Dental Care Division Director
TRICARE Management Activity*

Teaching your child good oral hygiene is a lesson that will last a lifetime. If parents set a good example for their children—brushing and flossing properly, eating a healthy diet, and visiting their dentist regularly—children are more likely to develop their own good habits as they grow up.

“We’ve really tried to focus on the oral health of our 1 to 4 year olds,” said Air Force Col. Gary Martin, director of the TRICARE Management Activity’s (TMA) Dental Care Division. “When young children experience significant dental disease, they often must be treated in an operating room under general anesthesia. That’s a big expense,” Martin explained. “If we can get them to go to the dentist early, we can reduce the risk of extensive dental disease and costly treatment.”

“An easy way to prevent tooth decay in children,” Martin said, “is to take advantage of the TRICARE Dental Program’s services.” “As part of reducing the disease, we want to increase the utilization of the preventive services,” Martin said. “Two exams and two cleanings every year are free.”

With early and regular visits to the dentist, and by teaching your children

good habits at a young age, parents can lessen the chance of their children needing surgery to restore diseased teeth.

To prevent early childhood cavities, Martin has some simple suggestions.

- Take your kids to the dentist by their first birthday or when their first tooth comes in. Baby teeth are smaller and have thinner enamel, so they are more susceptible to decay. Frequent visits to the dentist can keep your child’s teeth strong.
- Don’t let young children sleep with a bottle containing anything other than water and minimize infants’ and toddlers’ intake of sugary drinks, including fruit juices.
- Avoid using the same eating utensils as your children to prevent passing bacteria from your mouth to theirs. Your children aren’t born with the bacteria that cause tooth decay to their teeth.
- And most important, encourage good oral hygiene habits in your children.

“We have active duty dentists working at the bases trying to get the word out that frequent visits to the dentist have other benefits as well. If you go regularly, even if you have a cavity, it can be caught early, treated, and you and your dentist can discuss how to prevent future problems,” Martin said. ■

Ensuring Your Satisfaction

Voicing Your Concerns Will Help Improve Quality of Care

The TRICARE Management Activity and United Concordia are committed to ensuring you receive the highest quality dental care possible. Grievance procedures are available to ensure that you receive necessary quality care and that services are billed properly.

We have a process in place for you to voice the questions or concerns you may have about a dentist and/or service provided to you under the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP). Communicating your concerns will help us improve the quality of care you and your family members receive.

If you have a concern regarding the quality of care or service you received, we recommend you first discuss it with your dentist or his staff. If you still have concerns or if your concerns can’t be resolved by your dentist, you must submit your concerns *in writing* to United Concordia at:

United Concordia
TDP Quality of Care—Grievances
4401 Deer Path Road, DP-4E
Harrisburg, PA 17110

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Ensuring Your Satisfaction

Voicing Your Concerns Will Help Improve Quality of Care

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When submitting your letter, the following information should be included so your question or concern can be resolved promptly:

- Sponsor's name and Social Security number
- Patient's name and relationship to sponsor

- Dentist's name and address
- Detailed explanation of the issue

The Special Investigations Unit will investigate your question or concern, resolve it as appropriate and provide you with written notification of the resolution or results. ■

Moving with TDP: Easy as 1-2-3

Permanent change of station (PCS) moves are common during the summer season. It is good to know that your dental coverage is one thing you will not have to worry about. With the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP), your enrollment transfers easily to your new location with little to do on your part.

Dental Care on the Road

You are encouraged to obtain all dental care before you travel, but if you find you need dental care when you are traveling on vacation, business or during your PCS move, you are covered by the TDP. Simply visit any participating dentist—wherever you are. To find a participating dentist, call United Concordia or visit the TDP Web site at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com.

If there is no participating dentist where you are, visit any dentist and get the care you need. You may need to pay for the care up front and file a claim with United Concordia for reimbursement. At any time, if you need assistance, contact United Concordia at 1-800-866-8499.

Please remember when traveling overseas, that United Concordia does not have an established network of participating dentists in the OCONUS service area. Please contact the OCONUS Customer Service Department at 1-888-418-0466 or 1-717-975-5017 for assistance.

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Update DEERS

As with TRICARE's medical coverage, the first thing you need to do when you move is update your address in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Your sponsor may update DEERS during inprocessing at their new duty station or you can update your address in DEERS online at www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/address/index.jsp.

2

Update United Concordia

Contact United Concordia to update your address and phone number to ensure you continue to receive your billing statements, newsletters and other important information.

If moving to another location in the Continental United States (CONUS), call 1-800-866-8499. If moving to a location outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS), call the OCONUS Customer Service Department (toll-free) at 1-888-418-0466 or 1-717-975-5017.

3

Find a New Dentist

To find a participating dentist, call United Concordia or visit our Web site at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com. Remember, a participating dentist can save you time and money.

Moving Overseas? Think Twice before Disenrolling

If you are moving to the OCONUS service area, you should first assess your availability to dental care at your local dental treatment facility prior to making your decision to disenroll from the TDP. If you elect to disenroll from the TDP, you may do so within the first 90 days of your move. But keep in mind that you are not required to disenroll. You are completely covered by the TDP while living or traveling overseas. Plus, if enrolled overseas, you are still

covered for dental care when traveling back to the United States. Worldwide coverage is not a feature that most dental plans can boast, but the TDP is designed with its members in mind—members who often move or travel overseas. While the program works a little differently, the coverage and costs are the same. Make sure your family's dental needs are covered. ■

Attention: National Guard and Reserve Members

Oral Health is Your Responsibility

For members of the National Guard and Reserve, attaining and maintaining good oral health is not a luxury, it is an obligation.

“Fitness for duty is a personal responsibility,” Dr. J. Jarrett Clinton, then acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, said in the Feb. 2001 policy directive. “The (National Guard or Reserve) member must obtain the examination and report the result to their Service.”

Oral Health Affects Deployments

Poor oral health can be a danger during a deployment where dental care may not be readily accessible.

“There are studies that show if you arrive at your deployment site with dental care needs, you have a much greater chance of having a dental emergency than a member who deploys without needing dental

treatment,” said Air Force Col. Gary Martin, director of TRICARE Management Activity’s Dental Care Division.

Oral Health Documentation

Department of Defense (DoD) Health Affairs Policy No. 01-025 requires the uniformed services to ensure all members of the National Guard/Reserve undergo an annual dental examination.

The DD Form 2813, DoD Active Duty/Reserve Forces Dental Examination, is used to assist TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) enrolled National Guard and Reserve forces in documenting their dental health and can be downloaded at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com. Members who receive care from civilian providers under the TDP should provide their dentist with the DD Form 2813 to document their dental condition. TDP participating dentists will complete the form at no additional cost.

Oral Health is Affordable and Available with the TDP

To help ensure your dental readiness, the TDP is available to members of the National Guard and Reserve. For a \$10.51 per month premium, National Guard and Reserve members (Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve—Special Mobilization Category) can take advantage of the TDP. The TDP provides continuous dental coverage for National Guard and Reserve members and their families as they move through their careers and periods of activation and deactivation.

“We think the TDP is a great option for National Guard and Reserve members who don’t have other dental insurance. In addition, the TDP can be used to augment dental insurance they already have,” Martin said.

For more information on TDP benefits and policies for National Guard and Reserve members, please visit United Concordia’s Web site at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com. ■

Simple Steps to Prevent Dental Decay and Gum Disease

Brushing and flossing are the foundation of good oral health and the main preventive actions against tooth decay and gum disease. However, there are additional steps you can take to improve your oral health.

“A good place to start is by looking at your diet,” said Navy Cmdr. Robert Mitton, deputy director of the TRICARE Management Activity’s (TMA) Dental Care Division. “Individuals who have a diet high in sugar, who snack in between meals and drink soda frequently are at risk,” Mitton said.

A sticky film of bacteria, called plaque, constantly forms on the teeth and gums, according to the Journal of the American Dental Association. When sugars and starch from foods come into contact with plaque inside your mouth, an acid is produced that attacks the tooth enamel.

Eating a balanced diet and cutting out in-between meal snacks and sugary drinks can decrease the risk of tooth

decay. A balanced diet can also help prevent periodontal (gum) disease, which is an infection of the tissue surrounding and supporting your teeth. You can review dietary recommendations in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2005 Dietary Guidelines on the internet at: www.usda.gov/cnpp/dietary_guidelines.html.

For those who just can’t give up their soft drinks, Air Force Col. Gary Martin, TMA Dental Care Division director, has some advice to shorten the amount of time the sugary liquid is in your mouth interacting with plaque. “Don’t sip,” Martin said. “If you’re going to drink a soda, drink it, don’t sip it.” “And,” Martin and Mitton agreed, “to stay ahead of tooth decay and periodontal disease, it’s important to regularly visit your dentist. Both gum disease and cavities are totally preventable diseases.” ■

Online Enrollee Services at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com

The TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Web site at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com offers you a wealth of benefit information. You can find all the information you need from choosing a dentist to dental health information for adults and children. Everything you need to access your TDP benefit is at your fingertips.

The site is designed for you to find the information you need quickly. When you click on the “Enrollees” tab, there is a comprehensive list of resources available to you including “Online Enrollee Services.”

With United Concordia’s convenient online enrollee services, you can add family members to your coverage, submit a new TDP enrollment application, make changes to coverage or disenroll from the TDP. All you have to do is click “Online Enrollee Services” for the following list of available services:

- Enroll/Disenroll
- Pay Premiums
- Find a Participating Dentist
- My Dental Benefits

Enroll/Disenroll

You can make changes to your coverage (enrolling or disenrolling a family member) simply by filling out the *TDP Online Enrollment/Change Form*. You can also use this form to add or remove family members and change your address.

Three Ways to Pay Premiums

You can pay your premium online through United Concordia’s electronic billing system (eBill) using your credit

card or checking account. The following three payment options allow you to manage your payments in the way that is most convenient for you:

- Submit one-time payments manually.
- Schedule each payment for a specific date.
- Schedule an automatic, recurring monthly payment.

United Concordia recommends scheduling automatic recurring monthly payments. Choosing this option will ensure you and your family will have continuous coverage and will not have to worry about being disenrolled due to a late or forgotten payment.

Finding a Dentist

United Concordia is proud to offer you access to a network of over 57,000 participating dentists. To find one, just click on “Find a Participating Dentist” from the Online Enrollee Services menu and you will be directed to the following steps that will help you refine your search.

1. Select a Specialty. You can choose from a variety of dental specialties depending on your dental care needs. Specialties include:

- General Dentistry
- Oral Surgery
- Endodontics
- Orthodontics
- Pediatric Dentistry
- Periodontics
- Prosthodontics

2. Select a Search Method. This step allows you to further narrow your search based on your specific search criteria. You can only choose one of the following search options at a time:

- City/state
- Provider’s last name
- ZIP code only
- ZIP code/distance
- County/state

Please note that the TDP provides access to a general dentist located within 35 driving miles of your home. If you have trouble locating a dentist in your area, please contact United Concordia’s Customer Service Department at 1-800-866-8499.

If your dentist is not on the list of TDP dentists, you may use the “Nominate Your Dentist” tool to nominate your dentist and we will contact him or her about becoming a participating dentist.

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Important Enrollment and Billing (E & B) Information

Ensure Monthly Premiums are Paid

Timely payment of monthly premiums is critical for two reasons:

- To prevent any lapse in TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) coverage (TDP disenrollment due to non-payment of monthly premiums)
- To avoid potential collections actions

Premiums for active duty family members and National Guard and Reserve sponsors will be requested from the sponsor's military payroll account and reflected on the Leave and Earnings Statement (LES). When United Concordia is unable to deduct premium payments from the sponsor's payroll account, you will receive an invoice in the mail requesting payment. It's important that you carefully read all correspondence sent to you by United Concordia.

To avoid a lapse in coverage or possible collections actions, please make your payments to United Concordia by the twenty-third of every month.

For your convenience, United Concordia offers several payment options. You can:

- Mail your payment by check or money order as indicated on your invoice. Write the sponsor's Social Security number in the memo field of your payment.
- Or if you prefer, pay online at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com. Using electronic billing (eBill), you can pay your bills each month or set up an automatic recurring payment arrangement. You can pay via credit card or automatic deductions from your checking account. Instructions for setting up your online account can be found on the back of your monthly invoice and on the Web site.

If you choose, you can make bi-monthly, quarterly or even annual payments by mailing a check or money order at any time. There is no penalty for advance payment.

You should always verify that the correct dental deduction appears on the sponsor's LES.

Your TDP Billing Process is Now Easier!

Recent billing systems enhancements now allow United Concordia to deduct balances due to the sponsor's payroll account that will be reflected on the LES. This upgrade provides advantages. You will no longer be billed via a paper invoice for a TDP premium amount that is less than twice your monthly premium—this amount will now be deducted from the sponsor's DoD payroll account. You will, however, still receive a paper invoice for any amount due in excess of twice the monthly premium. If you have questions regarding this process, please contact United Concordia's Enrollment and Billing Member Services Department at eabem@ucci.com or call 1-888-622-2256. ■

Online Enrollee Services at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com

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My Dental Benefits

This online tool gives you access to all your specific dental information including benefits, eligibility, claims status, prior treatment information and much more. To begin accessing your dental benefits you need to register and establish a User ID and Password. To do this, you will need to complete the "Member Registration Form." Simply click the "Need to Register" link.

When you complete the Member Registration Form and click "Submit" you will be able to login and have immediate access to your dental benefit information. Click on "Member Listing" to view all the members who are enrolled. Please note, you will only be able to view benefit information for yourself and any dependents under the age

of 18. Your spouse and dependents over the age of 18 will need to complete the registration process themselves. They will only be able to access their benefit information. To view the details about you or a family member's coverage, click on the member name you would like to view.

You can conveniently view eligibility, individual benefit and claim information, procedure history or even print a replacement copy of your ID card. The tools for managing you and your family's dental care are all in one place—"My Dental Benefits" at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com.

United Concordia is committed to providing you with the best quality dental care possible. These tools will help you find the information to get the dental care you need. Visit www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com today! ■

Smokeless Tobacco—A Serious Health Problem

Using any type of tobacco product is dangerous to your health, not just cigarettes and cigars. Smokeless tobacco has become a serious health problem in recent years. Also known as dip, chew, spitting tobacco and snuff, **smokeless tobacco is a significant health risk and is not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes.**

There are many health risks you should be aware of if you use smokeless tobacco:

- It can cause oral cancer.
- Use can lead to nicotine addiction and dependence.
- It can irritate your gum tissue, causing it to recede or pull away from your teeth. Once this gum tissue recedes, the roots of your teeth are exposed, increasing your risk for tooth decay. The roots of your teeth also may become sensitive to hot and cold or other irritants, which means you could experience some discomfort when eating or drinking.

- It can cause periodontal disease and tooth loss.
- It can cause sores, ulcers, blisters, or lesion of the gums, lips or mouth, that do not heal.
- Sugars, often added to enhance the flavor of smokeless tobacco, can increase your risk for tooth decay.

“The most significant risk is for oral cancer—that’s the big scare,” said Air Force Col. Gary Martin, director of the TRICARE Management Activity’s (TMA) Dental Care Division.

“More people have been taking up the chewing habit in recent years,” he said. “As we’ve pushed not smoking—you can’t smoke in your offices and work spaces—people have turned to smokeless tobacco,” he explained. “It’s hard to convince a young, healthy adult of the dangers of using smokeless tobacco.”

According to Martin, oral cancer is a disease that takes a tremendous toll on its victims. “The sad thing is the survival rate for oral cancer is very

low,” he said. “Surgery to remove the cancer is often disfiguring and your five-year survival rate is poor.” According to the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, **only one-half the number of persons diagnosed with oral cancer are alive five years after the diagnosis.**

Despite being a hard habit to break, there is help available for smokeless tobacco users. Most military installations have health and wellness centers staffed by people ready to assist anyone who wants to quit. Help is also as close as the nearest dentist’s chair.

“If you want to quit but need some help, contact your dentist or primary care manager,” Martin suggested. ■

What You Need to Know about Oral Cancer

The use of tobacco products can lead to oral cancer. Survival rates for this type of cancer are poor so prevention and early detection are very important.

Eliminate Risk Factors

There are several factors that affect your chances of developing oral cancer. You can decrease your risk by being aware of the following:

- Oral cancer occurs most often in people who use tobacco.
- Alcohol use combined with smoking increases your risk.
- Prolonged exposure to the sun increases the risk of lip cancer.
- Studies have shown that a diet high in fruits and vegetables may prevent the development of pre-cancerous lesions.

Another key factor in limiting your risk is to visit your dentist for regular check-ups. Your dentist will examine all areas of your mouth and can test any areas that appear suspicious.

Know the Warning Signs

While prevention is the best defense against oral cancer, knowing the early signs of the disease can lead to more successful treatment, which increases the survival rate.

Some signs of oral health problems associated with smokeless tobacco are evident by looking in your mouth. “You can pull your lip down and see if you have any recession of the gums,” noted Navy Cmdr. Robert Mitton, deputy director, TMA Dental Care Division. “In addition, if you observe bleeding in the area where you place your smokeless tobacco, it’s cause for concern.”

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What You Need to Know about Oral Cancer

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Oral cancer often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth. It can affect any area of the oral cavity including the lips, gums, insides of the cheeks, tongue and the tissue of the roof of the mouth.

Some signs and symptoms of oral cancer include:

- A persistent sore or irritation that bleeds easily and does not heal
- Red and/or white lesions
- Pain, tenderness or numbness anywhere in the mouth or lips

- A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth completely
- A thick, whitish patch on the inside of the cheeks, gums or tongue

Check your mouth routinely. If you observe anything unusual or suspect you have any of the signs or symptoms, you should see your dentist or physician as soon as possible. ■

Make the Most of Your TDP—Use a Participating Dentist

Why Should I Use a Participating Dentist?

Participating dentists have signed a contract with United Concordia. This means participating dentists:

- Accept United Concordia's allowance for covered services as payment in full, charging the enrollee only the applicable cost-share percentage*
- Will file your claim with United Concordia at no additional charge
- Participate in United Concordia's quality assurance programs
- Submit predetermination requests as needed
- Will complete the DD Form 2813, DoD Active Duty/Reserve Forces Dental Examination, for National Guard and Reserve members at no additional cost

**Participating dentists will not request payment for covered services that exceed United Concordia's allowance.*

How Do I Know If My Dentist is a TDP Participating Dentist?

- Ask your dentist if he or she *participates* in the TDP, not if he or she accepts the TDP or United Concordia. Most dentists (participating and non-participating) will accept payment from United Concordia. The difference is that non-participating dentists will bill you for covered services that exceed United Concordia's allowance.

How Do I Locate a Participating Dentist?

- Visit the TDP Web site at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com to search for a dentist by last name, specialty, city, county or ZIP code.
- Call United Concordia at 1-800-866-8499.
- Contact your local Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator (BCAC)—the BCAC directory is located at www.TRICARE.osd.mil/BCAC. ■



Dental Implants—Make an Informed Decision

The TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) now includes coverage for dental implants. You should discuss with your dentist whether an implant is right for you. There are some things you need to consider in order to make an informed decision regarding implants.

Cost is a Factor

A single implant will most likely use up all of your \$1,200 annual maximum.* Additionally, you are responsible for a 50 percent cost-share for these services. Furthermore, implants involve not only the surgical placement of the implant itself but are generally followed by a crown or other prosthodontic device. This may require two different dentists to perform these two separate services.

** Although dental implants might use up your \$1,200 annual maximum, you may still be able to obtain other dental services. That is because diagnostic services (including some X-rays) are not subject to the \$1,200 annual maximum. You can still receive two exams and two cleanings in a 12-month period at no cost to you when provided by a participating dentist.*

Since you will have an out-of-pocket expense, it is recommended that you submit a request for predetermination when planning implant treatment. It is also wise to submit a predetermination for both the implant placement and the subsequent crown or other prosthodontic service. (OCONUS procedures differ—see the **OCONUS Requirements** section of this article.) This process allows you and your dentist to know prior to treatment if the treatment will be covered by United Concordia, as well as the anticipated payment amount.

To request a predetermination, ask your dentist to submit a dental claim form with the proposed treatment information. Your dentist will submit the claim for predetermination with the required X-rays. No dates of service are needed when requesting a predetermination because the services have not been performed.

Once processed, United Concordia will notify you and your dentist through a Dental Predetermination Notification and Request for Payment Form. A predetermination is not a guarantee of payment, but it gives you an idea of the cost involved based on the information submitted at the time the determination was processed.

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Facts about Fluoride

Fluoride is a mineral that when used in small amounts on a routine basis, helps to prevent tooth decay by strengthening tooth enamel. Fluoride is most effective when combined with a healthy diet and good oral hygiene. We've all heard about fluoride, but there are some things you might not know.

Not all water contains the same amount of fluoride.

Bottled, filtered and well waters vary in their fluoride amount, so a water analysis may be necessary to ensure your child is receiving the proper amount. Children between the ages of 6 months and 16 years may require fluoride supplements. You should check with your dentist or physician who will consider factors such as your child's age, risk of developing dental decay and your child's diet before recommending a fluoride supplement.

Fluoride is found in other sources besides toothpaste, supplements and drinking water.

Fluoride is found naturally in most teas, fresh fruits and vegetables. Fluoride is also found in many processed

foods. Eating a healthy diet will help ensure you are receiving enough fluoride on a daily basis.

Swallowing too much toothpaste can be harmful.

Young children, especially preschool-aged children, should not swallow any toothpaste. You should carefully supervise your children and only let them use a small, pea-sized amount on the brush. While fluoride is documented to be safe and highly effective, only small amounts of fluoride are necessary for a maximum benefit. Research shows that fluoride can be very toxic when overdosed. If not monitored, children may easily swallow over four times the recommended daily amount of fluoride in toothpaste. As a rule, do not leave toothpaste tubes where young children can reach them. The flavors that help encourage them to brush may also encourage them to eat toothpaste.

Talk to your dentist or physician if you have questions about fluoride or if you think you or your child may need a fluoride supplement. ■

Dental Implants—Make an Informed Decision

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Limitations Apply

- Members under age 14 are not eligible for implant services unless submitted with X-rays and approved by a United Concordia Dentist Advisor.
- Implants are not covered when placed for a removable denture.
- Replacement of an implant is covered only if the existing implant was placed at least five years prior to the replacement and the implant has failed.
- Replacement of implant prosthetics is covered only if the existing prosthetics were placed at least five years prior to the replacement and satisfactory evidence is presented that demonstrates they are not, and cannot be made, serviceable.
- Repair of an implant-supported prosthesis and repair of an implant abutment are only payable upon report by a United Concordia Dentist Advisor

review. The report should describe the problem and how it was repaired.

OCONUS Requirements

Enrollees living overseas who choose to have dental implants must obtain a Non-Availability and Referral Form (NARF) from an overseas dental treatment facility (ODTF) or their TRICARE Area Office (TAO) before having the work done off base. The NARF, once required for all dental services not provided by an ODTF, is now only needed for dental implants and orthodontics.

“In the past, if you lived overseas you may have received all of your dental care at the on-base dental clinic,” said Navy Cmdr. Robert Mitton, deputy director of the TRICARE Management Activity's (TMA) Dental Care Division. “Now, if the base facility

doesn't have the dental resources or availability, they will give you the NARF for off-base dental care.”

You must use a provider identified on the host-nation provider list for off-base implants (and orthodontics) in both remote and non-remote locations. “One of the reasons you must use an identified host-nation provider is so that services can be monitored for safety, quality and cost-effectiveness,” Mitton said. The host-nation provider list is available from the TAO, U.S. Embassy or Consulate office, or from other local representatives of the U.S. Government.

Refer to your *TRICARE Dental Program Benefit Booklet* or visit www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com for more information regarding dental implant services. ■

Dental Hygiene for Babies and Toddlers

Establish Good Habits Before Their First Birthday

Just like well-baby check-ups at the physician's office, you should schedule your baby's first dental check-up with a dentist before his or her first birthday. The first dental visit can be as early as when the first tooth comes in, but by the first birthday is a good rule to follow.

Prevent Tooth Decay

Dental problems can begin early. One of the biggest concerns is "Early Childhood Caries," commonly known as "baby bottle tooth decay." This condition presents as extensive cavities and can result from putting your baby to bed with a bottle or allowing at-will, nighttime nursing. Treatment of baby bottle tooth decay often involves costly care in an operating room under general anesthesia, which can be traumatic for both baby and parent.

Here are some tips to avoid tooth decay due to Early Childhood Caries:

- Don't put your children to bed with a bottle.
- At-will nighttime nursing should be avoided after baby's first tooth erupts.
- Encourage your child to drink from a cup as he or she approaches the first birthday.
- Avoid nighttime breast-feeding after the first tooth erupts.
- Avoid putting juice in your baby's bottle.

Baby Those Baby Teeth

It is important to take good care of your child's primary teeth, or baby teeth, until they are lost naturally. Baby teeth not only help your child chew food, but also play an important role in speech development and save a space for permanent teeth so they can grow in properly.

Even before your baby's first tooth comes in, you can practice good dental habits at home by cleaning his or her gums with a soft infant toothbrush and water. You can also use a soft washcloth. Most small children do not have the dexterity to brush their own teeth. Check with your dentist as to when you should start using fluoridated toothpaste on your child.

Monitor Thumb Sucking

Thumb and finger sucking is perfectly normal, and most children will stop on their own around age 2. If they don't stop on their own, you should encourage them to stop, especially after age 4. Prolonged thumb or finger sucking can result in crowded, crooked teeth or bite problems. Ask your dentist or physician for tips to help your child stop their habit. Remember, while thumb, finger and pacifier sucking may all affect your child's teeth the same way, a pacifier habit may be easier to break than the others.

Prevention is the Key

At this early age, prevention is the key to a healthy smile and good dental habits as an adolescent and an adult. To locate a dentist, visit www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com or call 1-800-866-8499.

If living overseas, contact your overseas dental treatment facility or TRICARE Area Office for (TAO) assistance.

- TAO—Europe:
call 49-6302-67-6312/6314 or visit www.europe.tricare.osd.mil
- TAO—Latin America and Canada:
call 1-706-787-2424 or visit <http://tricare15.army.mil>
- TAO—Pacific:
call 011-81-6117-43-2036 or visit www.tricare.osd.mil/pacific. ■

Childhood Enrollment in the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP)

Children under the age of 4 may be voluntarily enrolled in the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) at any time. TDP coverage for a child under age 4 requires you to add him/her to an existing TDP contract. This can be accomplished by filling out the TDP Online Enrollment/Change Form located at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com. If you already have the TDP family plan, addition of a child under age 4 will not increase your premium. It's important that you take this action to enroll your child prior to his/her receipt of dental treatment. If this action is not taken, claims received for dental care will be denied.

Children will be automatically enrolled on the first day of the month following their fourth birthday as long as one other family member is enrolled. This may result in a premium rate change if the plan changes from a single plan to a family plan. United Concordia will notify the sponsor of the child's enrollment and premium rate change, if any. If you have questions, please contact the TDP Enrollment and Billing Member Services Department at 1-888-622-2256.

Toothbrushing 101

When it comes to brushing your teeth, there is always room for improvement. Don't brush for the sake of brushing—make sure you're doing it right!

Choose the Toothbrush that's Right for You

You can easily be overwhelmed by the hundreds of manual and powered toothbrushes that are available. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends you brush your teeth twice a day with a soft-bristled brush. The size and shape of your toothbrush should fit your mouth so you can reach all areas easily. Choose a toothbrush that carries the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance—an important symbol of any dental product's safety and effectiveness.

Brush Properly

Brushing your teeth everyday is critical to maintain good oral hygiene and remove plaque. You should brush your teeth at least twice a day with an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste. Brush your teeth gently to avoid irritating your gums. Be sure to clean all the surfaces of your teeth, and when brushing along the gum line, place your brush at a slight angle toward the gums.

Floss Daily

Cleaning between your teeth once a day with floss or inter-dental cleaners removes plaque from between the teeth. Your toothbrush can't clean these areas. Flossing daily also prevents periodontal (gum) disease.

Replace Your Toothbrush Often

You should replace your toothbrush (including toothbrush heads for powered toothbrushes) every three to four months or sooner if the bristles become frayed. Children's toothbrushes usually need replacing more frequently because they can wear out sooner. It is also a good idea to change your toothbrush if you have been sick to avoid the risk of re-infection.

Caring for Your Toothbrush

Follow these simple guidelines to take care of your toothbrush until you replace it:

- Rinse your toothbrush thoroughly with tap water after brushing to remove any remaining toothpaste and debris.
- Store your brush in an upright position and allow the toothbrush to air-dry between brushings.
- Don't routinely cover toothbrushes or store them in closed containers.
- If more than one brush is stored in the same holder or area, keep the brushes separated to prevent cross-contamination.
- Don't share toothbrushes! Sharing a toothbrush can result in an exchange of body fluids and/or microorganisms and increases the risk for infection, especially for persons with compromised immune systems or infectious diseases.

If you need additional information about brushing your teeth, you can discuss it with your dentist. Other resources and oral health care tips are available to you at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com or www.ada.org. ■



Correction

TRICARE Dental Health Matters Issue 1: 2006 incorrectly listed United Concordia's CONUS customer service telephone number. The correct CONUS customer service number is 1-800-866-8499.

TRICARE Dental Health Matters



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TRICARE Dental Health Matters is published by the TRICARE Management Activity. Please provide feedback at <http://www.tricare.mil/evaluations/feedback>.

Dental Sealants Help Prevent Cavities

The following article provides some basic information about dental sealants. We encourage you to talk to your dentist about whether dental sealants are right for your child.

What Are Dental Sealants?

A dental sealant is a plastic material that is applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth (molars) to prevent cavities.

How Do They Work?

The plastic material acts as a barrier so cavity-causing bacteria can't get into the pits and grooves in the chewing surfaces of the teeth.

Are Sealants Hard to Place?

No. In fact, sealants are quick and easy to apply. The teeth are cleaned and prepared with a solution to make the plastic stick to the teeth. The plastic is then painted on the tooth where it then hardens.

Should My Child Have Sealants Placed?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 90 percent of children's cavities occur in teeth that have pits and grooves. Two-thirds of those occur on the chewing surface. Research has shown that dental sealants prevent cavities on teeth with pits and grooves. As a result, it is recommended that dental sealants be placed on the molar teeth of children shortly after they erupt. The first permanent molars erupt in children around age 6, with the second set of permanent molars appearing around age 12.

Are Sealants Covered Under the TRICARE Dental Program?

Yes, sealants are covered under the TRICARE Dental Program on permanent molars through age 18. The cost-share for covered sealants is 20 percent. If you live in an OCONUS area you will not have a cost-share.*■

* *Selected Reserve and IRR family members and IRR (other than Special Mobilization Category) members are responsible for the applicable cost-share portion regardless of where the treatment is received.*