

## **Don't Let Your Toothbrush Make You Sick This Cold and Flu Season**

Many people are concerned about staying healthy during the winter months with cold, flu and the H1N1 viruses going around. That's why Delta Dental of Illinois recommends taking steps to keep your toothbrush germ-free.

We know to wash our hands often and cover our mouths when we cough or sneeze. But don't forget about the toothbrush, which visits the mouth several times per day. Dr. Katina Morelli, dental director of Delta Dental of Illinois, offers a few tips for making sure your own toothbrush doesn't make you sick this winter.

- You should replace your toothbrush every 4 months because toothbrushes wear out and don't clean as effectively once the bristles become worn down. But if you do get sick, be sure to replace your toothbrush right away.
- Sterilize your toothbrush once per week. One minute in the microwave for a wet toothbrush or one run through the dishwasher will do the trick.
- Store your toothbrush away from others and don't share toothpaste. Airborne bacteria can be shared between toothbrushes stored near each other in warm, moist environments like the bathroom. You also can avoid cross-contamination of germs by giving each member of the family their own tube of toothpaste and using an individual travel size container when someone is sick.
- Wash your hands before and after brushing. Anytime the hands are near the mouth, they can transfer bacteria.