

(StatePoint)—Oral hygiene is tied to a pet's overall health. Studies show that keeping a pet's mouth healthy may increase life expectancy by up to two years.

This February is National Pet Dental Health Month, and it's a great time to get started improving a dog's oral health. Prevent or reduce chances of developing oral disease by beginning a hygiene regimen from an early age.

"It's important to start good oral hygiene as early as possible," says Bob Scharf, president of Sergeant's Pet Care Products. "According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80 percent of dogs show symptoms of oral disease by the age of three. However, it's never too late to take better care of your dog's teeth."

A few easy steps can help get started.

Signs of Oral Disease

Keep an eye out for bad breath and unusual or excessive drooling and pawing at the mouth, as they can be signs of dental problems.

In addition to bad breath, poor oral health can lead to kidney and heart disease. The bacteria in the mouth can build up, entering the bloodstream via the gums.

This puts extra work on the kidneys to filter out bacteria. And these bacteria can set up house in a dog's heart valves, potentially leading to a condition called valvular endocarditis.

Establish a Routine

To ensure better dental health, brush the dog's teeth daily. This can be daunting, but half the challenge is getting started and developing a routine.

Dogs need help brushing their teeth. With this in mind, the experts at Sergeant's Pet Care Products developed a line of dental products targeting plaque, a buildup of bacteria, and tartar, which occurs when plaque hardens and adheres to tooth enamel.

Get dogs used to the experience by squeezing canine tooth paste on the finger and putting it between their cheeks and gums.

Canine toothpaste has special food flavoring, making it appealing to pets. As they lick the paste, praise them constantly.

Keep initial brushing sessions to a few gentle seconds. Once the dog is used to having his teeth brushed, do so for about a minute daily.

Treats Can Help

Other items and treats can help canine oral care, such as dental chews and rawhides which promote chewing and mechanically remove plaque. Additionally, feeding a dog hard kibbles instead of soft, moist food is slightly better at keeping plaque from accumulating.

More tips and information on pet dental care products are available at www.sentrypetcare.com. By following a simple dental routine a dog can be kept happy and healthy for years to come!