

## PRESS RELEASE

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## February is National Pet Dental Health Month

*Vermont Veterinarians say Pets, Like Humans, Need Regular Checkups*

By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association  
M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

If you ever wonder what your teeth would look like if you never brushed or flossed, take a look at your dog or cat's teeth! 85% of dogs and cats have dental disease by age three years!! Dental tartar is not just cosmetic. In our pets, as in humans, it can lead to serious health consequences. Because pets don't brush away plaque, it mineralizes into tartar. This in turn pushes up under the gums, providing a spot for bacterial infection in the bone and gums. The infection loosens the ligament that holds the tooth and eats away at the bone around it. This is a very painful process. Eventually, the tooth falls out and, if the bone damage is severe enough, the jaw can break. The bacteria from the mouth can spread to other areas of the body, leading to infection in organs such as the heart, liver, kidneys.

The only way to resolve dental disease is to have a professional cleaning with your veterinarian because a thorough dental cleaning on pet teeth requires general anesthesia at a veterinary clinic. It is similar to what a person receives at their dentist's office: visible tartar is removed with instruments, tartar at the gum line is removed with more delicate instruments, tartar under the gum line is scraped and removed, and the teeth are polished to smooth any unevenness left by the tartar. (This is important because unpolished teeth collect plaque and tartar much quicker than normal.) After the dental cleaning, the pet's mouth is thoroughly examined by a veterinarian to look for/and remove any loose/broken or diseased teeth, as well as checking the inner lips, tongue, and gums. Many veterinarians also perform dental x-rays to assess the roots and look for disease under the gum line. One important point to remember, once the veterinary dental procedure is over, new plaque and tartar will form so home care as advised by your veterinarian is very important to maintain the health of your pet's mouth.

Unfortunately, some pet owners try to overlook their pet's dental problems or, in some cases, allow groomers or pet salons to do "dental work" which in most cases is just brushing the teeth and giving a breath spray. Some groomers do "non-anesthetic dental

scaling" which is cosmetic at best. They are unable to clean under the gum line or on the inside surfaces of the teeth where much of the dental disease can be hidden. In addition, the restraint as well as the prodding fingers and sharp instruments can injure pets, sometimes severely. Cuts to the gums, neck sprains and anxiety from restraint have all occurred. Pet owners are misled into thinking they are receiving professional care, when in fact these unsupervised, unregulated non-veterinarians could be putting their pets at risk. The American Animal Hospital Association has said it best: *“Dental cleanings that are done without an anesthetic will make your pet’s teeth prettier, but not healthier.”* The American Veterinary Dental College goes one step further: It considers this work to be illegal: *“Anyone providing dental services other than a veterinarian, or a supervised and trained veterinary technician, is practicing veterinary medicine without a license and is subject to criminal charges”*.

Have your veterinarian perform a thorough exam of your pet and its mouth every 6 to 12 months. They can suggest ways to prevent dental disease and if your pet has dental disease, they have the right equipment, training, medications and skills necessary to address it. Veterinarians have made a lifetime commitment to the health and welfare of all animals and proper care, beginning with addressing dental disease, can help your pet can live a longer healthier life.

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*The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit [www.vtvets.org](http://www.vtvets.org) or call (802) 878-6888.*