



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 11, 2008

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Bethann Dacey  
(800) 342-8747, Ext. 253

**Shopping for Tooth Whitening at the Mall?**

Malls and shopping centers across the country now offer everything from hair salons, to massages, to a place to stop for a quick manicure. So what about another cosmetic procedure you can now have done at the mall—tooth whitening?

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) suggests that before doing this makeover, you should definitely think it over.

Tooth whitening kiosks and stores have been springing up across the nation's malls, promising whiter, brighter teeth in just 20 to 30 minutes, with a lower cost than the dentist's office. The process is fairly simple: A tooth-whitening technician fills a mouth tray with a special whitening gel, the customer places the tray in his or her mouth, and then is seated in a reclined position in front of a special blue light to activate the gel. The cost is anywhere in the hundreds of dollars, with sales sometimes offered.

But is it worth it—and is it safe?

“I don't see that having your teeth whitened in a mall would necessarily be dangerous,” says Dr. Milton Glicksman, president of the Massachusetts Dental Society. “But you are not having a dentist evaluating your teeth prior to the whitening process. This exam may reveal reasons not to whiten or other oral diseases which may supersede whitening.”

The employees at these franchise-owned stores and kiosks are not dentists, dental hygienists, or dental assistants. They are called tooth-whitening technicians, and they direct customers how to insert the gel-filled tray into their own mouths and position the light. This means that these stores and kiosks do not fall under the umbrella of dentistry, and this has the American Dental Association (ADA) concerned.

“The mall kiosks, unfortunately, are not regulated,” says Dr. Matthew J. Messina, an Ohio-based dentist and consumer advisor for the ADA. “They are operating outside of the dental practice acts in each state, and as such, people should not expect infection control guidelines to

be followed. Also, HIPAA requirements do not apply, so confidentiality is not ensured. The employees of the kiosks are not dental professionals...In effect, they are masquerading as health care professionals, which should make all of us in the profession concerned. The public expects a high standard of care from the dental profession, and these kiosks are not in the business of living up to that standard because they are not part of the profession.”

So how can someone whiten his or her teeth safely? The Academy of General Dentistry says that the best whitening results depend upon the use of a custom-made bleaching tray, which a dentist will be able to properly fit. Also, whitening strips may be another effective option. In any case, having a thorough exam performed by your dentist is crucial to detect any issues, such as dental decay or gum recession, that need to be addressed prior to whitening.

“It is recommended that a person have a dental exam within the last year before beginning any whitening procedure,” says Dr. Messina.

###

The Massachusetts Dental Society is a 5,000-member professional association and statewide constituent of the American Dental Association.