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**February is National Pet Dental Health Month**

**Take a bite out of the cost of veterinary care – checking your pet’s teeth  
can help prevent major long-term health problems**

Birmingham, MI, February 3, 2011 -- For pet owners who are looking for ways to save money on veterinary care, taking care of their pet’s teeth is one sure way to take a bite out of vet bills. This is according to Dr. Cindy Houlihan, DVM, of The Cat Practice in Birmingham, who says that dental care is one of the most often overlooked pet care areas that can lead to serious illness – and serious veterinary expenses – down the road.

During February, which is National Pet Dental Health Month, pet owners are being reminded to pay attention to their dog’s or cat’s pearly whites. Although dogs and cats rarely get cavities, plaque and tartar can cause gingivitis and periodontal disease. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by age 3, and 85% of adult pets have some form of periodontal disease. Not only can pets experience tooth decay, bleeding gums and tooth loss, but underlying bacteria can travel through the bloodstream and cause heart, lung, liver and kidney damage.

“Unfortunately, if a pet is experiencing organ damage, by the time the symptoms surface, it is usually a very serious condition,” says Dr. Houlihan. “And pet owners are often surprised that this can occur even in young animals.”

Pets feel the same pain as humans if they have mouth ulcers, tooth decay and tooth abscesses, however they often mask their suffering. Dr. Houlihan says to watch your pet closely and immediately see your veterinarian if your pet is showing any of these signs:

- Reluctance to play or is quieter than normal.
- Reluctance to eat or is having difficulty picking up food or chewing dry food.
- Favoring one side of the mouth or pawing at the mouth.
- Noticeable pain when you touch his/her mouth or face.
- Bad breath (halitosis) which could signal build up of bacteria.
- Redness or bleeding around the gums.
- Swelling in the face or mouth area.
- Excessive drooling.

Dr. Houlihan says that a regular dental care routine for pets is essential to ensure their overall wellbeing and reduce the risk of more serious health problems in the future. This should include annual dental exams in which the veterinarian will ask about and check for these symptoms as well as look for loose or broken teeth, tartar build up and infection around the teeth or gums.

What is the best way to prevent dental disease in the first place? In addition to regular veterinary exams, Dr. Houlihan says, there are also a number of things that pet owners can do at home:

- Brush your pet's teeth weekly with specially formulated dog or cat toothpaste.
- Feed your pet specially-formulated foods that combat plaque and tartar buildup. For a complete list, go to [www.thecatpracticepc.com/links.html](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com/links.html)
- When purchasing pet foods or treats, look for the seal of acceptance from the Veterinary Oral Health Council, an organization initiated by the American Veterinary Dental Society to guide consumers. The seal appears on products that meet defined standards for plaque and tartar control in dogs and cats.

“Good oral care is one of the few areas in which pet owners can play a direct role in disease prevention,” Dr. Houlihan says. “Plus they can save money in the long run by avoiding serious health issues later on.”

#### **About Dr. Houlihan**

Dr. Houlihan has been a veterinarian since 1986. She is co-owner of The Cat Practice, Michigan’s first cats-only veterinary hospital which is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> year. The Cat Practice provides advanced preventative and medical care with an emphasis on early detection to help cats live longer, better and healthier lives. Located at 875 South Worth in Birmingham, Michigan, The Cat Practice cares for feline purebred and mixed breeds from around southeastern Michigan. For information go to [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com) or call 248-540-3390.