

# Oral Health and Pregnancy - Fact Sheet for Health Care Providers



## What does the research say about oral health and pregnancy?

- Periodontal disease (PD) (infection of the gums and bone surrounding the teeth) is seen in up to 40 percent of pregnant women.
- PD is *associated* with preterm birth, low birth weight, preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, but causality has not yet been established and evidence of an association is not consistent across studies.
- In pregnant women with *existing diabetes*, PD contributes to poor glycemic control and can increase rates of preeclampsia, orofacial clefts and preterm birth.
- So far, there is no evidence that treating PD during pregnancy reduces adverse pregnancy outcomes; however, treatment is effective in reducing periodontitis and the number of periodontal pathogens in the mouth.
- Good oral health in the mother lowers the chance of transmitting dental disease-causing bacteria to her child.

## What can you do to help your patient have good oral health during pregnancy?

- Ask your patient these 3 questions:
  1. Do you have swollen or bleeding gums, a toothache (pain), problems eating or chewing food, or other problems in your mouth?
  2. When was your last dental visit?
  3. Do you need help finding a dentist?
- Provide anticipatory guidance on how to care for the mouth.
- Check the patient's mouth for obvious signs of oral disease (e.g., cavities, infection, bleeding gums).
- Refer to a dentist (using a referral form) and help the patient get dental care, particularly those who don't have dental insurance or can't afford to pay for care.

## What about getting oral health care during pregnancy?

- Oral health care is safe throughout pregnancy. Delaying treatment can lead to more serious problems.
- Dental x-rays can be safely taken anytime during pregnancy with appropriate shielding.
- Brushing after vomiting can cause enamel loss; a woman should rinse with 1 teaspoon of baking soda mixed with a cup of water instead. Wait an hour after vomiting to brush.

## Great References:

**Oral Health Care During Pregnancy**, Maryland Department of Health, 2018.

<https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/oralhealth/Documents/PregnancyGuidanceDocument.pdf>

Comprehensive practice guidelines for prenatal and oral health providers. Includes photos and explanations of common oral health conditions during pregnancy and pharmacological considerations.

**Smiles for Life—A National Oral Health Curriculum**, Society of Teachers of Family Medicine Group on Oral Health, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2010.

<https://smilesforlifeoralhealth.org>

Nationally-recognized curriculum containing seven modules, including a module on pregnancy and oral health. Continuing educational credits are offered.

**Perinatal Oral Health Assessment Form**, MaineHealth. 2017

<https://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/38355.pdf>

Assessment form for documenting oral health status. Includes photos of common oral health conditions seen during pregnancy.

**Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement**, The National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center, 2012. [https://www.mchoralhealth.org/materials/consensus\\_statement.php](https://www.mchoralhealth.org/materials/consensus_statement.php)

Consensus statement developed by the Health Resources and Services Administration, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Dental Association.

**Oral Health Care During Pregnancy and Through the Lifespan**, Committee Opinion No 569. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2013 (Reaffirmed 2017).

<https://www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Health-Care-for-Underserved-Women/Oral-Health-Care-During-Pregnancy-and-Through-the-Lifespan>

**Evidence-Based Guidelines for Health Professionals During Pregnancy & Early Childhood**, The California Dental Foundation, February 2010.

[https://www.cdafoundation.org/Portals/0/pdfs/poh\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.cdafoundation.org/Portals/0/pdfs/poh_guidelines.pdf)

Extensive discussion of the current research on the link between oral health and pregnancy outcomes, sample dental referral form, practice guidelines.

**Oral Health Care during Pregnancy and Early Childhood Practice Guidelines**, New York State Department of Health, 2006.

<https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0824.pdf>

Comprehensive background on oral health and pregnancy and practice guidelines, including a sample dental referral form.

**Why Oral Health Matters to Pregnant Women**, Children's Oral Health Project,

<http://www.endcavities.org/during-pregnancy/> and <http://www.endcavities.org/resources/>

Website offering a fact sheet (with citations) on oral health and pregnancy, a patient education video and sample social media messages.

**Oral Health Care During Pregnancy A Resource Guide, Second Edition**, National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center, 2017. <https://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/oralhealthpregnancyresguide.pdf>

Comprehensive resource with professional education tools and training.