



DID YOU KNOW?

Pregnancy and Oral Health

Did you know that pregnancy is a time to take extra special care of your teeth and gums? Your oral health can affect the general and dental health of your unborn child.

How Can My Oral Health Affect Me and My Baby? Pregnant women who have gum disease may be **six times more likely to have a baby that is born too early and too small.** Any infection during pregnancy is cause for concern. A mouth infection can lead to premature birth and low birth weight, putting your unborn baby at serious risk for life long conditions such as cerebral palsy, chronic lung disease, or even death. In fact, pregnant women with gum disease are six times more likely to deliver their babies early than women with healthy gums. What's more, recent research suggests that the hormones the body releases to trigger labor may be similar to those released in response to an infection.

Other research suggests a link between maternal oral health during pregnancy and the development of early childhood caries, also known as baby bottle tooth decay, affecting up to 1 in 10 children below the age of 6 in the U.S. Since tooth decay is a communicable disease that can be transmitted from person to person, a reduction in maternal cavity-causing bacteria may diminish transmission of these bacteria between mother and child.

What Needs To Be Done? Preterm birth rates continue to rise in the US. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, an average preterm birth costs \$75,000 compared to an average of \$1,300 for a full-term infant.

An August 2003 article published in the *Journal of Periodontology* found that a simple dental procedure that involves removing plaque and tartar from deep pockets under the gum tissue and smoothes the teeth's roots to remove bacterial toxins, may reduce premature births in pregnant women with gum disease by as much as 84 percent. The Department of State Health Services' Oral Health Program needs to continue to raise awareness on the importance of maintaining good oral health during pregnancy. While good oral hygiene during pregnancy is essential, it may be even more important that a woman see a dentist during her pregnancy.

The federal government has designated 31 percent of Texas counties as "dental health professional shortage areas." Even where there are enough dentists, many Texans simply cannot afford the cost of a dental visit. Routine dental care for adults is not a covered service under the Texas Medicaid program, a joint state-federal program that pays for health care for eligible low income individuals. As a result, low-income women, even those who qualify for Medicaid, have very few options for dental care.

What Are We Doing In Texas To Improve Oral Health And Pregnancy Outcomes? The Oral Health Program's mission is to improve the oral health of Texans and to prevent dental disease through education, preventive dental services, and the collection of surveillance data. The Oral Health Program currently has a classroom-based curriculum available called "**Parent, It's Up To You!**" This educational curriculum contains information on: 1) dental care during pregnancy, 2) dental care for infants, and 3) dental care for preschoolers.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

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