



May is Pregnancy Awareness Month: Don't overlook importance of dentist visits, oral health

Most pregnant women recognize how important their health is for their baby's health, but may ignore a critical component of their oral health. In fact, over a quarter of mothers neglected to visit a dentist during pregnancy,¹ which is key to helping prevent harmful oral and overall health problems for themselves and their babies.

Women who are pregnant should schedule a dental checkup and cleaning within the first trimester of their pregnancy, said Dr. Katina Morelli, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. Dentists can identify and treat teeth and gum problems, lowering the risk for more serious, ongoing health problems for both a mother and her baby.

While having a healthy mouth is always important, pregnancy can intensify dental disease. Minor dental problems that exist before pregnancy could worsen. Oral infections can also present risks to an expectant mother's overall health, leading to other medical problems during pregnancy.

Expecting mothers and even women who are planning to become pregnant need to pay special attention to their oral health, said Morelli. It's never too late to start good oral health habits to ensure your mouth is healthy.

While oral health habits are controllable, some pregnancy side effects may wreak havoc on a woman's oral health. For instance, nausea and vomiting affect 80 percent of all pregnant women. The stomach acid from vomiting can erode tooth enamel, making teeth sensitive and more vulnerable to decay.

Most moms-to-be also experience cravings. The additional snacking can lead to increased tooth decay. Giving into cravings for sugary foods can be worse for expecting mothers' teeth, since sugar has been identified by oral health experts as major cause of tooth decay.

A mother's oral health can also affect her baby. Hormonal changes during pregnancy can exaggerate the way gum tissue reacts to plaque, increasing the risk for gingivitis, the first stage of periodontal (gum) disease. In some studies, pregnant women with gum disease have given birth to low-weight or pre-term babies, who are at risk for many serious diseases.

Along with visiting the dentist, Delta Dental of Illinois offers the following tips to help prevent oral health complications during pregnancy:

- Brush your teeth twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste and floss daily.
- Limit foods containing sugar to mealtime only. If you do give into one of those cravings, drink a glass of water while snacking and brush your teeth once you're done.

- Choose water or low-fat milk as a beverage and avoid carbonated beverages.
- Choose fruit rather than fruit juice to meet the recommended daily fruit intake.
- If you suffer from morning sickness, make sure to rinse your mouth out with water and baking soda solution afterward. The combination will neutralize the acid. Also brush your teeth gently and chew Xylitol gum.

For more information, visit www.mouthmattersil.com.

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¹ *Morpace Inc. conducted the 2009 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Random 15-minute telephone interviews were conducted nationally with 914 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of error is ±3.2 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*