



Increased Oral Health Care Vigilance During Pregnancy is Encouraged

Most pregnant women recognize how important their own overall health is for their baby's health, but may ignore a critical component—their oral health. In fact, a survey¹ of American children's oral health conducted on behalf of Delta Dental Plans Association found that nearly four out of 10 American mothers neglect to visit a dentist during pregnancy. Such a visit can help prevent harmful oral and overall health problems for mothers and their babies.

“Expectant mothers and women who are planning to become pregnant need to pay special attention to their oral health and should schedule a dental checkup and cleaning to address any dental problems,” said Northeast Delta Dental's Vice President, Professional Relations and Science, Shannon Mills, DDS. “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 problems. 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. Some studies have suggested that pregnant women with moderate-to-severe gum disease may be more at risk to give birth to low-weight or pre-term babies, who are at risk for many serious diseases.

Dental hygiene habits are controllable, but 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.² The stomach acid from vomiting can erode tooth enamel, making teeth sensitive and

more vulnerable to decay. A woman may also be less willing to follow her usual pattern of regular brushing and flossing during pregnancy.

Most moms-to-be also experience cravings. The additional snacking can lead to increased tooth decay. Giving in to cravings for sugary foods can be worse for expectant mothers' teeth, since sugar is a major cause of tooth decay.

Along with visiting the dentist, Northeast Delta Dental offers these suggestions to help prevent oral health complications during pregnancy:

- Brush your teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, and floss once daily.
- Limit foods containing sugar to mealtime only. If you do indulge 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 to drink, and avoid carbonated beverages.
- Opt for fruit rather than fruit juice to meet the recommended daily fruit intake.

If you suffer from morning sickness, rinse your mouth out with water and baking soda solution afterward. The combination will neutralize the acid. Also brush your teeth gently and, if you chew gum, choose one with xylitol as the main sweetener.

1. Morpace Inc. conducted the 2011 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted by email nationally with 907 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of error is ±3.25 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

2. American Academy of Family Physicians, "Nausea and Vomiting of Pregnancy," 2003.