



## 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?** 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 or 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.

Pregnant women who have gum disease may be **six times** more likely to have a baby that is born too early and too small.

Other research suggests a link between maternal oral health during pregnancy and the development of early childhood caries (ECC), an especially damaging form of tooth decay affecting up to 1 in 10 young children in the U.S. Since tooth decay is an infectious disease, a reduction in maternal cavity-causing bacteria may diminish transmission of these bacteria between mother and child.

**What Needs To Be Done?** The Department of State Health Services' Oral Health Group needs to continue to raise awareness on the importance of maintaining good oral health during pregnancy. Good oral hygiene during pregnancy is essential, but it may be even more important that a woman see a dentist during her pregnancy.

Premature births have soared to become the number one obstetric problem in the United States. A premature birth costs \$75,000 on average versus a normal birth that costs about \$1,300 on average.

An August 2003 article published in the *Journal of Periodontology* found that a simple dental procedure that involves removing plaque and tartar from deep within 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. Unfortunately, however, many Texans do not have access to dental care.

The federal government has designated 42 percent of Texas counties as "dental health professional shortage areas." Even where there are enough dentists, many Texans simply cannot afford the visit. Routine dental care for adults is not a covered service under the Texas Medicaid program. This joint state-federal program pays for health care for poor people. As 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 Group's mission is to improve the oral health of Texans and to prevent dental disease through education, preventative dental services, and emergency dental treatment. The Oral Health Group developed and currently distributes a classroom-based curriculum 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:

Department of State Health Services

Oral Health Group

1100 W. 49th St.

Austin, TX 78756

Telephone (512) 458-7323

Fax (512) 458-7256

<http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/dental/default.htm>