

# Guidance for Prenatal Care Health Professionals

This guidance has been excerpted from *Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement*. The consensus statement was developed by an expert workgroup convened in 2011 by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau in collaboration with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Dental Association and coordinated by the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center.

Prenatal care health professionals may be the “first line” in assessing pregnant women’s oral health and can provide referrals to oral health professionals and reinforce preventive messages.

## Assess Pregnant Women’s Oral Health Status

During the initial prenatal evaluation

- Take an oral health history. Following are examples of questions that prenatal care health professionals may ask pregnant women. This information may be gathered through a conversation or a questionnaire.
  - Do you have swollen or bleeding gums, a toothache (pain), problems eating or chewing food, or other problems in your mouth?
  - Since becoming pregnant, have you been vomiting? If so, how often?
  - Do you have any questions or concerns about getting oral health care while you are pregnant?
  - When was your last dental visit? Do you need help finding a dentist?
- Check the mouth for problems such as swollen or bleeding gums, untreated dental decay (tooth with a cavity), mucosal lesions, signs of infection (e.g., a draining fistula), or trauma.
- Document your findings in the woman’s medical record.

## Advise Pregnant Women About Oral Health Care

- Reassure women that oral health care, including use of radiographs, pain medication, and local anesthesia, is safe throughout pregnancy.
- If the last dental visit took place more than 6 months ago or if any oral health problems



were identified during the assessment, advise women to schedule an appointment with a dentist as soon as possible. If urgent care is needed, write and facilitate a formal referral to a dentist who maintains a collaborative relationship with the prenatal care health professional.

- Encourage women to seek oral health care, practice good oral hygiene, eat healthy foods, and attend prenatal classes during pregnancy. (See *Guidance for Health Professionals to Share with Pregnant Women*.)
- Counsel women to follow oral health professionals’ recommendations for achieving and maintaining optimal oral health.

## Work in Collaboration with Oral Health Professionals

- Establish relationships with oral health professionals in the community. Develop a formal referral process whereby the oral health professional agrees to see the referred individual in a timely manner (e.g., that day, the following day) and to provide subsequent care.
- Share pertinent information about pregnant women with oral health professionals, and coordinate care with oral health professionals as appropriate.

## Provide Support Services (Case Management) to Pregnant Women

- Help pregnant women complete applications for insurance or other sources of coverage, social services (e.g., domestic violence services), or other needs (e.g., transportation, translation).
- If the woman does not have a dental home, explain the importance of optimal oral health during pregnancy. Help her obtain care by facilitating referrals to oral health professionals in the community, including those who serve pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid and other public insurance programs, or by contacting a dental office to schedule care.



## Improve Health Services in the Community

- On the patient-intake form, include questions about oral health (e.g., name and contact information of oral health professional, reason for and date of last dental visit, previous dental procedures).
- Establish partnerships with community-based programs (e.g., Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children [WIC], Early Head Start) that serve pregnant women with low incomes.
- Provide a referral to a nutrition professional if counseling (e.g., guidance on food choices or nutrition-related health problems) would be beneficial.
- Integrate oral health topics into prenatal classes.
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Take the time to ensure that women understand the information shared with them.