

COHW Guidelines

Providing Oral Health Education for Pregnant Mothers

Myths about Oral Health and Pregnancy

1. *“Getting mouth x-rays during pregnancy is not safe.” -FALSE!*
Dental x-rays are safe during pregnancy. Make sure you tell the dentist you are pregnant and protect your abdomen and neck with a “lead apron”.
2. *“Wait to get dental treatments until after delivery.” -FALSE!*
Don’t wait to get care until after delivery. There is no evidence that getting dental care during the first trimester is harmful. However, the mother’s mouth health is linked to preterm birth and passing decay germs to the baby after birth.
The second trimester is the best time to get dental work done and visit the dentist.
Avoid getting dental work done during the first or third trimesters unless there is infection, pain, or an emergency.
3. *“If your gums bleed when you brush or floss, stop brushing and flossing.” -FALSE*
Keep brushing and flossing even if your gums bleed – hormones during pregnancy make bleeding gums common, but this will improve after delivery.
4. *“If you have morning sickness or throw up, brush your teeth right away.” -FALSE*
Don’t brush your teeth right after throwing up/morning sickness. Instead, rinse with 1tsp baking soda in 8oz warm water and spit it out. Wait at least 60 minutes before brushing.

Oral Health for Pregnant Mothers

Mothers can pass cavity-causing germs to their babies; in fact, parents/caregivers are the #1 way babies get these germs. Moms with healthy mouths increases the possibility of having babies without cavities.

- Brush 2x per day for 2 minutes with a soft bristle brush and fluoridated toothpaste
- Floss at least once per day, especially at night
- Visit a dentist every 6 months
- Drink tap water with fluoride
- Chew sugarless gum with Xylitol as the first ingredient. It fights decay because the bacteria in the mouth cannot digest it to produce acid.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months
- Do not share toothbrushes
- Teeth develop before birth. Eat healthy for baby’s development. Limit sweets/carbs. If you eat or drink sweet things, have them at mealtimes and rinse with water after.

Oral Health After Delivery

- Breastfeeding is best, at least until 6 months old and best through 12 months of age.
- No juice for infants. At 6 months, or when the baby can sit, start offering plain water with fluoride in a sippy cup.
- Do not let baby fall asleep with a bottle or breast in the mouth. Milk (even breastmilk) contains sugar and pools in the mouth, so wipe the baby's mouth after feeding.
- Never dip pacifiers in sugary liquids and give to babies. Do not orally cleanse pacifiers (passes germs/bacteria from your mouth to baby's). Wash pacifiers daily with soap and hot water.
- Don't share saliva (utensils, kisses, toothbrushes) – you can pass germs that cause cavities to your baby.
- Before the first tooth erupts, gently wipe gums every day with a clean washcloth or finger brush and water after a bottle, after breastfeeding, and before bedtime.

After the First Tooth Erupts

- Children need parental help brushing their teeth **until around 8 years old (when they are able to tie their shoelaces)**
- Brush teeth and gums gently with a small soft baby toothbrush twice daily (after breakfast and before bed) using a smear of fluoride toothpaste the size of a grain of rice for kids under 3 years old. No need to rinse. A pea size for kids 3 and older.
- Children should brush 2x per day for 2 minutes using a soft bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Use a new toothbrush every 2-3 months.
- Brush in gentle circles at a 45-degree angle at gum line to get *under* gums.
- Begin flossing when the child's teeth touch each other.
- Do not share toothbrushes.