



Oral Health

Postpartum care includes comprehensive oral health services for necessary dental care.

Benefits:

- Maintaining good oral health during pregnancy can help prevent conditions like gingivitis, tooth erosion, dental caries, and periodontitis, reducing the risk of preterm birth and other potential complications such as low infant birth weight and preeclampsia.
- Improving maternal oral health can prevent the transmission of harmful bacteria to children, reducing the likelihood of tooth decay in infants.
- Virginia's pregnancy Medicaid dental benefit increased dental insurance and dental care utilization among women enrolled in Medicaid and reduced disparities between Medicaid and privately insured groups.
- More generally, regular dental care can aid in early detection of potentially serious medical conditions since many systemic diseases produce oral signs and symptoms. Furthermore, addressing periodontal infections and disease can help with managing diabetes and lowering risk of heart disease.

Definition:

Preventive care, screenings, and oral health treatments enhance maternal health outcomes. During pregnancy, maternal dental caries, or cavities, often increase due to increased mouth acidity, greater intake of sugary snacks, and decreased attention to oral health maintenance—all of which increase risk of pregnancy complications. However, oral health is frequently overlooked during this time. The postpartum period offers a crucial opportunity to address untreated dental issues, as mothers with cavity-causing bacteria can transmit these bacteria to their baby, potentially impacting the child's oral health.

Current Landscape and Guidance:

Overview

- Dental care is underutilized during pregnancy, especially for women enrolled in Medicaid: only 37.4% of women enrolled in Medicaid received a basic cleaning during their pregnancy. Access to dental care depends directly on income, with women with the lowest income being the least likely to have received dental care, and varies by race/ethnicity.
- 80% of obstetricians did not use oral health screening questions in their prenatal visits and 94% did not routinely refer patients to dentists.
- People with Medicaid are less likely to have dental care in the postpartum year than people with commercial insurance.

Medicaid

Medicaid is uniquely situated since states often cover dental services, whereas routine dental services are usually carved out in private health insurance. As of October 2022, all 50 states and DC offer dental coverage for pregnant and postpartum individuals through 60 days after their pregnancy ends. 32 states and DC's Medicaid programs offer extensive pregnancy dental coverage, 13 states offer limited pregnancy dental coverage, and 5 states offer emergency pregnancy dental coverage.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT:

- The estimated medical cost savings ranges between \$1,500 and \$2,400 per year per pregnant woman receiving periodontal treatment for Medicaid programs.
- Regular dental exams and preventive care lead to fewer claims for major and restorative work, resulting in lower premiums for employers and lower out-of-pocket costs for employees. Employer groups spending more on preventive dental care saw 16% lower combined dental claims costs.

BRIGHT SPOTS:

Colorado's Medicaid program provides many of the same dental services coverage to pregnant adults as the general adult population

With preventative dental care, Colorado and Minnesota Medicaid programs provide four cleanings per year for pregnant adults, two more than the general adult population payment rates.

