

MATERNAL ORAL HEALTH AND PREGNANCY OUTCOMES

Executive Summary

Maternal Oral Health and Pregnancy Outcomes

Report prepared for the

saskatchewan
preventioninstitute
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Prepared by Vinay Pilly and Carli Haffner

Executive Summary

This review of the literature, conducted by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, examines the relationship between maternal oral health (i.e., periodontal disease) and pregnancy outcomes for both the mother and her fetus/infant. The purpose of this report is to provide a foundation for knowledge translation activities by the Prevention Institute which are aimed at making the information accessible to both oral health professionals and other health care professionals who care for pregnant and postpartum women as well as to women of child bearing age. The report highlights key prevention measures that can be undertaken by the Prevention Institute and its community partners, as well as areas for advocacy at the provincial and regional levels.

In the past decade, multiple reports have highlighted the potential link between periodontal disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Potential risks linked to maternal periodontal disease in the prenatal period include preeclampsia, gestational diabetes mellitus, perinatal mortality and miscarriage. The most identified health risk of maternal periodontal disease during labour is the delivery of a pre-term low birth weight infant (PLBW). Other potential outcomes related to maternal periodontal disease include health risks for the child, adolescent and adult offspring (e.g., cardiovascular disease and diabetes).

According to multiple researchers, periodontal infection is highly prevalent among women of childbearing age, particularly low-income women and women of racial and ethnic minority groups. Other socio-demographic and maternal characteristics related to periodontal disease include: advancing age, smoking, diabetes and other systemic diseases, genetics, nutritional status, level of oral hygiene, and socioeconomic status. The literature reveals that the majority of pregnant women do not access dental care. Potential barriers to accessing dental care identified in the literature include: pregnant women not recognizing they have an oral disease; the belief that poor oral health is common during pregnancy; the belief that dental treatment can harm the fetus; a lack of information regarding the importance of oral care; a lack of practice standards; and inadequate dental insurance.

Because of the potential link between maternal periodontal disease and poor pregnancy outcomes, oral health promotion (including efforts to prevent poor oral health) is particularly important among women contemplating pregnancy and those who are already pregnant. Oral health promotion should include educating reproductive-aged women, health care providers and dental professionals regarding the importance of oral health during pregnancy and their ability to prevent/manage periodontal disease. Listed below are the Key Prevention Measures that have been highlighted in the report. These have been divided into those measures that could be implemented by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute and other community organizations, and those that require advocacy to Government.

Key Prevention Measures for Community Organizations:

- Educate pregnant and preconception women about the risks of periodontal disease during pregnancy.
- Increase awareness among dental and health professionals of the risks associated with periodontal disease during pregnancy.
- Increase awareness among women and dental professionals on the safety of oral treatment during pregnancy.
- Encourage all pregnant or preconception women to consult with an oral health professional.
- Encourage and support future research endeavours regarding oral health during pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and communication between dental and health professionals.
- Provide evidence-based information and facilitate conferences, workshops and continuing education sessions.
- Encourage provincial Ministry of Health, health regions and professional organizations to issue messages specific to perinatal oral health.
- Include in perinatal care oral health anticipatory guidance and referral for pregnant women.
- Encourage dental professionals to provide pregnant women with assessment, anticipatory guidance, and treatment when indicated.
- Conduct a provincial needs assessment.

Key Prevention Measures at the Provincial Government level:

- Reduce geographic and other barriers to accessing care.
- Implement incentives to encourage young graduates to set up practices in areas with inadequate supply of dentists.
- Issue advisory to dental professionals about the importance and safety of treating pregnant women.
- Support community water fluoridation and expand preventive dental public health programs among sections of the population exhibiting greatest dental health disparities.
- Introduce a surveillance system to evaluate the relationship between pre-term and low birth weight birth and poor maternal oral health status.

To assist in determining which of the highlighted prevention measures would be most appropriate at this time for Saskatchewan, the Prevention Institute will be conducting a scan of existing resources and programs, along with a Needs Assessment, throughout the province.

To obtain a copy of the full report, or to request further information please contact:

Maternal and Infant Health Coordinator
Saskatchewan Prevention Institute
info@preventioninstitute.sk.ca