

## Dental care: An important part of a healthy pregnancy

Expectant mothers might not realize that oral health is a key factor in a healthy pregnancy, said Sylvia Knight, product manager for Evernorth<sup>®</sup> Health Services Care Solutions. Pregnancy [can affect oral health](#), increasing the risk of gum disease, tooth decay, and other issues, yet many women don't get the dental care they need.<sup>1</sup>

"There's a sizable emphasis on the medical side in pregnancy – which is absolutely essential – but oral health tends to get overlooked," Knight said. In response to this gap in care, Cigna Healthcare has added its Dental Oral Health Integration Program (OHIP) to its [Pregnancy Support Pilot](#). The pilot, which is in its third year, promotes healthy birth outcomes and maternal care in underserved communities in several U.S. cities, with plans to expand.

The pregnancy pilot team recently added dental health benefits to the program after seeing higher preterm birth rates and lower utilization of dental care among women of color, Knight said. OHIP provides pilot participants with enhanced dental benefits and reimburses them for out-of-pocket expenses related to those benefits. Stephanie Miller, a business analytics advisor at Cigna Healthcare, said that early indications suggest a correlation in the reduction of preterm birth complications when a customer utilizes the services provided by OHIP.

"Though more comprehensive analytics are needed to assess the impact of the complete program, from a trend perspective, we are noticing some decline in preterm birth rates since OHIP auto-enrollment was incorporated into the program," she said.

Pregnancy pilot provides a spectrum of care

The pregnancy pilot includes dedicated provider partners to engage pregnant customers in culturally appropriate prenatal care while providing a spectrum of services that address whole-person needs and social determinants of health (SDOH), including behavioral health screenings, no-cost prenatal vitamins, aspirin to prevent preeclampsia (where indicated by a physician), education support, and monthly food box delivery during pregnancy for those with food insecurities.

To date, the pilot has delivered impressive results, with high engagement levels (65%), and more than 2,000 complimentary filled prescriptions to help reduce medical complications that could lead to preterm births.

#### Oral health and pregnancy facts

About 60% to 75% of pregnant women have gingivitis, an early stage of periodontal disease. Untreated, the bone supporting the teeth can be lost and the gums can become infected. Periodontitis has been associated with poor pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth and low birth weight.

Pregnant women with a lot of cavity-causing bacteria during and after pregnancy could transmit it from their mouth to the mouth of their baby. Early contact with these bacteria can lead to early childhood cavities and extensive dental care at a young age.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (May 2024). "Talking to Pregnant Women about Oral Health" [LINK](#)



Even more to smile about

If you'd like to learn more about Cigna Healthcare's Pregnancy Support Pilot and OHIP, please contact your Cigna Healthcare account representative.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Dental Work While Pregnant, Cigna Healthcare<sup>SM</sup> (cigna.com), accessed August 2024.

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