



**Washington Dental Service Foundation
Prenatal Oral Health Initiative
Overview**

Washington Dental Service Foundation: The mission of the Washington Dental Service Foundation (The Foundation) is to prevent dental disease and improve overall health for residents of the state of Washington. The Foundation focuses on prevention and targets the majority of its efforts toward young children ages 0-6 and seniors. The Foundation is taking its prevention efforts with children even farther upstream by addressing the dental health of pregnant women.

The Issue: Mothers who have cavities are likely to pass along cavity-causing bacteria to their babies, increasing the chances of their babies getting cavities. Conversely, mothers with good oral health and knowledge are in the best position to protect their children from cavities.

The Initiative: To ensure pregnant women – and their babies – have good oral health, The Foundation launched its Prenatal Initiative in 2010, and is rolling it out in three phases:

- **training dentists** to manage the care of and treat their pregnant patients;
- **partnering with community organizations to deliver oral health information and messages to pregnant women** that motivate them to get dental care; and
- **training prenatal health providers** to provide oral health education, screenings, and referrals.

Training Dentists: The Foundation started with dentists because they are critical to ensuring that pregnant women have good oral health. If dentists do not treat pregnant women, it is nearly impossible for many women to achieve good oral health before their babies are born. Additionally, Medicaid coverage in Washington State includes dental benefits for pregnant women both during pregnancy and for two months after the birth of a child, facilitating pregnant women's ability to receive dental care.

The Foundation, in collaboration with the University of Washington Schools of Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Medicine developed a course for dentists, *Oral Health from Birth: Using Evidence Based Care to Manage and Treat Your Pregnant Patients*. The course addresses dentists' liability concerns, outlines the safety and timing of dental treatment during pregnancy, and provides guidance about using and prescribing medications with pregnant women. It is based on evidence-based guidelines developed by the New York State Department of Health and the California Dental Association Foundation, as well as the 2012 Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement Summary of an Expert Workgroup Meeting. The course has been incorporated into the University of Washington School of Dentistry's curriculum and has been delivered in community settings to more than 600 dental professionals.

Delivering Messages to Pregnant Women: The Foundation is partnering with community organizations – like WIC and home visiting programs – to deliver information, messages, and referrals to pregnant women so they will understand the importance of good oral health during pregnancy and will visit the dentist. Key messages include:

- oral health during pregnancy is important for mother and baby;
- mother's oral health can influence her child's oral health; and
- dental care during pregnancy—including medications and x-rays—is safe for mother and baby.

Training Prenatal Health Providers: The Foundation will launch this phase of the initiative in early 2013. The Foundation will train prenatal providers (doctors, nurses, and midwives) to provide oral health education, screenings, and referrals to dental care to their pregnant patients.

For more information about the Washington Dental Service Foundation's Prenatal Oral Health Initiative, contact Emily Firman at (206) 528-7364 or efirman@deltadentalwa.com.