



**CIGNA HealthCare
of Arizona**

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENTS

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PERIODONTAL DANGERS DURING PREGNANCY– Between morning sickness, heartburn, exhaustion and the excitement of pregnancy, the temptation to skip a routine dental check-up may be very enticing. In fact, the American Dental Association reports many pregnant women don't visit a dentist during pregnancy, even if they have symptoms of dental problems or current dental conditions.

Missing those check-ups, however, may be harmful to both expectant mothers and their babies. "Periodontal or a disease better known as gum disease is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bones supporting the teeth. Gum disease has been associated with an increased risk for pre-term and low birth weight babies, which are babies born before their due date or those born with a weight less than five pounds, eight ounces," said Miles Hall, D.D.S, MBA, National Dental Director for CIGNA Dental.

According to research, this elevated risk may be due to the inflammation and by-products from the gum infection. Additionally, elevated levels of estrogen and progesterone during pregnancy may alter a woman's body chemistry making her more susceptible to the bacteria that leads to gum disease. The added snacking and possible decrease in oral hygiene that often occurs during pregnancy may also raise a woman's risk of developing gum disease. For this reason, thorough brushing and daily flossing are important components to maintaining oral health during pregnancy.

Dr. Hall lists the following symptoms that may signal gum disease:

- Bleeding, swollen or tender gums
- Chronic bad breath
- Chronic bad taste in your mouth

Dr. Hall recommends pregnant women schedule a dental check-up early in their pregnancy as according to one study, women who develop severe gum disease during their second trimester are up to seven times more likely to give birth prematurely. The American Dental Association reports that as much as 18 percent of pre-term, low birth weight infants born each year may be linked to gum disease.

In an effort to reduce the number of pre-term and low birth weight infants born throughout the United States, CIGNA is a national sponsor of the March of Dimes national prematurity campaign, and the CIGNA Foundation is a proud sponsor of the 2005 March of Dimes WalkAmerica events in Arizona. This year's Phoenix-area walk is scheduled for April 2. To sign up to walk and to learn more about premature births, visit the March of Dimes website at www.marchofdimes.com.

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