

EMBARGOED UNTIL 0:01AM TUESDAY AUGUST 2, 2016

Urgent call for pregnant women to pay more attention to their teeth and gums

60% are unaware¹ of the increased risk of gum disease during pregnancy², with an alarming one in two (53.7%) avoiding the dentist while pregnant¹

- A new survey reveals that while morning sickness, increased snacking, and sugary cravings are all too common for women during pregnancy, 76 per cent¹ are unaware that morning sickness can increase the risk of tooth decay.³
- More than one in four¹ avoid visiting the dentist during pregnancy thinking it is unsafe
- Experts are calling on all women to consider the dentist as part of the team of health professionals they consult during pregnancy.

August 2 2016, Sydney – A new survey from the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has uncovered mums across the country, despite being at increased risk of gum disease and permanent tooth damage,² are jeopardising the health of their teeth and gums by avoiding a visit to the dentist during pregnancy (53%).¹

The *Australian Women and Dental Health Survey* released during Dental Health Week (1 – 7 August, 2016), which sought the views of women at different stages in their life, comes as a concern to the nation's experts who warn it's crucial for women to consult their dentist during pregnancy, as hormone changes can make gums more prone to bleeding, swelling and inflammation – which can lead to an increased risk of gum disease resulting in tooth loss².

Thirty-eight percent of pregnant women have experienced symptoms of gum disease, such as bleeding gums (21.3%), gum sensitivity (16%) and sensitive teeth (13.4%)¹. Three quarters (76%)¹ were not aware that morning sickness can lead to permanent damage to teeth, and many believe that it is not safe to visit the dentist while pregnant.

“The prevalence of gum disease during pregnancy is high, with one in two pregnant women affected. Morning sickness can cause permanent damage to teeth, and frequent vomiting can also coat teeth with strong stomach acids, which can weaken the tooth enamel and increase the risk of tooth decay and erosion. Clearly we need to do more to dispel the myths around the danger of visiting the dentist when pregnant,” said Dr Peter Alldritt, Dentist and Chair of the ADA's Oral Health Committee.

“Getting a check-up during pregnancy is not only safe, but important for a woman's dental health, and the health of her unborn child. Pregnancy is a crucial stage in a woman's life, and maintaining oral health is directly related to good overall health. Gum disease and dental damage can be managed during pregnancy as long as women take appropriate preventative steps to help protect their teeth – such as visiting the dentist on top of brushing and flossing daily.”

The ADA is putting women at the forefront of Dental Health Week 2016 and is encouraging those who are seeking information on how to protect their teeth and gums during periods of hormonal change, such as puberty, pregnancy and menopause, to visit www.dentalhealthweek.com.au where they can access information.

In addition to concerns regarding the oral health of Australian women during pregnancy, the survey also found that two thirds (67.1%)¹ of Australian teenage girls going through puberty don't regularly visit the dentist⁵.

Also for those entering menopause, almost half (48.9%) have experienced signs of gum disease including sensitive teeth (26.9%) and dry mouth (14.4%)¹, yet 70% admit they do not visit the dentist every six months.¹

- ENDS -

Six ways pregnant women can protect their oral health

1. Visit the dentist regularly, especially during your pregnancy, and let them know you are pregnant.
2. Maintain good oral hygiene by brushing twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste, and flossing daily.
3. Follow a healthy and balanced diet, and where possible reduce your intake of sugary foods and drinks. If you experience sugar cravings, be smart with your snacking and opt for low sugar, healthy food options such as fruit and yoghurt.
4. Drink water between meals and after snacks to rinse the food particles away.
5. If you experience morning sickness, remember to rinse your mouth with water following vomiting, and wait at least one hour before brushing your teeth.
6. Chew sugarfree gum after eating and drinking to stimulate saliva flow to help neutralise acid.

Interviews available with: Dr Peter Alldritt, Dentist and Chair of the ADA's Oral Health Committee

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About the Australian Dental Association:

The Australian Dental Association is the national peak body for dental health and dentistry. The primary objectives of the Australian Dental Association are to encourage the improvement of the oral and general health of the public, promote the ethics, art and science of dentistry and support members to provide safe, high quality professional oral care.

 www.facebook.com/AustralianDentalAssociation

 www.facebook.com/HealthyTeethAustralia

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About the survey:

The Australian Dental Association's *Australian Women and Dental Health Survey* was commissioned by the Australian Dental Association in March 2016 and conducted by research house Pure Profile. The survey of 1,000 women, aged 18-64 years, was undertaken in order to understand the dental habits and attitudes of women who have been pregnant, teenagers through the eyes of mums, as well as those entering menopause.

References:

1. Australian Women's Oral Health Survey, March 2015, conducted by Pure Profile commissioned by the Australian Dental Association
2. Better Health Channel Victoria. 2014. Pregnancy and teeth. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/pregnancy-and-teeth> [Accessed 1 April 2016].
3. Australian Dental Association INC. Oral health and pregnancy [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.babyteeth.com.au/static/pdfs/pregnancy-fs-web.pdf> [Accessed 1 April 2016]
4. The Department of Health. 2013. Clinical Practice Guidelines Antenatal Care - Module 1. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/clinical-practice-guidelines-ac-mod1~part-b~lifestyle-considerations~oral-health>. [Accessed 1 April 2016].