

## DEAR COLLEAGUE:

Each year, approximately **400 VERMONT CHILDREN** under age 6 are treated for early childhood tooth decay in a hospital setting. As a result, these children—often from low-income families—are at a higher risk of oral health problems throughout their lives.

The source of these problems begins soon after birth. Bacteria that causes dental decay can be passed from mother to baby through everyday actions like a mother wiping off a pacifier with her mouth or kissing her baby on the lips. Dental decay during pregnancy may lead to serious health consequences for both mother and baby.

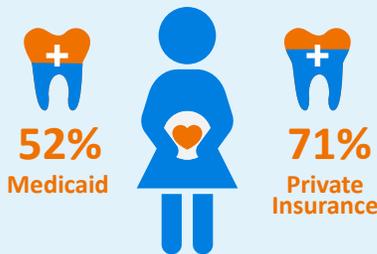
These problems and their related costs, both financial and human, can be prevented—and you play an important role in the solution.

To help guide your care of pregnant women and their young children, the enclosed *Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement* provides the latest information and care guidelines.

This letter serves as a Vermont endorsement of these best practices, and has been agreed upon and signed by key leaders in the primary care and dental fields.

### THE ISSUE:

- Pregnant women may avoid going to the dentist when they are pregnant.
- Prenatal providers don't always talk about the importance of oral health during pregnancy.
- Dentists are sometimes hesitant to treat pregnant women.



In 2013, **52%** of Vermont women on **Medicaid** reported having a dental visit during pregnancy compared to **71%** of women who had **private insurance**.

### THE PROBLEM:

Pregnant women who have poor oral health may transmit the bacteria that causes dental decay to their children, which leads to millions of dollars of unnecessary costs.



The *Streptococcus mutans* bacteria that causes **dental decay** can spread between **mother and baby**.

**400+**

Approximately 400+ Medicaid-eligible Vermont children are treated for early childhood tooth decay in a hospital each year.

**= \$2 million** annually

### THE ASK:

**DENTISTS & PROVIDERS:**

**YOU ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO HELP LOW-INCOME PATIENTS ACCESS FREE DENTAL CARE DURING PREGNANCY AND IN THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD.**

**For Medicaid-eligible pregnant Vermonters, access to dental care is now free.** In 2013, the Vermont Legislature removed the adult benefit maximum applied to pregnant women receiving benefits under the Dr. Dinosaur/Medicaid program.

This means that pregnant women insured by Medicaid are not limited to the annual cap on dental services. This allows pregnant women the opportunity to complete all needed dental work before the baby is born, and continues for 60 days postpartum. All they need is encouragement, a referral, and a dentist who accepts them.



**AS A VERMONT HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**, you can help to identify, prevent, and address oral health issues at key points throughout your patients' pregnancies and early childhood.

**AS A VERMONT DENTIST**, you can complete the cycle by accepting and comprehensively treating pregnant women and young children in your practice.

All while being reimbursed for patient consultations, exams, and necessary procedures.

## THE SOLUTION:

**PRENATAL CARE PROVIDERS, MEDICAL CARE PROVIDERS, AND DENTAL CARE PROVIDERS WORKING TOGETHER TO PROMOTE ORAL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD.**



*Robin Miller*  
**Robin Miller, RDH, MPH**  
 Director, Office of Oral Health

*Breena Holmes*  
**Breena Holmes, MD**  
 Director, Maternal & Child Health Division

*Marjorie Meyer*  
**Marjorie Meyer, MD**  
 Department of Obstetrics,  
 Gynecology & Reproductive Sciences  
 Maternal Fetal Medicine  
 University of Vermont

*Heather Blair*  
**Heather Blair, RDH, MPH**  
 President – Vermont Chapter

*Barbara Frankowski*  
**Barbara Frankowski, MD, FAAP**  
 Immediate Past President –  
 Vermont Chapter  
  
 Vermont Chapter

*Allyson Bolduc*  
**Allyson Bolduc, MD, FAAP**  
 Past President

*Sarah Squirrell*  
**Sarah Squirrell**  
 Executive Director

*Vaughn Collins*  
**Vaughn Collins**  
 Executive Director

If you would like support incorporating evidence-based guidelines into your practice, or if you need help developing a dental referral list, please contact the Vermont Department of Health's Office of Oral Health at [AHS.VDHPublicCommunication@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.VDHPublicCommunication@vermont.gov) or 802-863-7330.

