Virginia Oral Health Coalition

Dental Benefits for Pregnant Women Enrolled in Medicaid and FAMIS MOMS

Providing comprehensive oral health benefits for approximately 45,000 pregnant women eligible for Medicaid and FAMIS MOMS will save Virginia money, contribute to safety net sustainability and improve health.

- **Dental coverage can improve safety net sustainability and reduce costly emergency department visits:**
  - Currently, 61% of all dental patients visiting a federally-qualified health center are uninsured and free clinics provide an additional 14,500 dental visits to uninsured Virginians.[1]
  - Uninsured individuals are found to visit the emergency department for dental issues more than any other diagnosis. The average cost of these visits is $669; no treatment is provided.[2] Cost to Medicaid for periodontal treatment is less than $100 per quadrant.[3]
  - Oral conditions that require restorative care, such as decayed and broken teeth, can lead to dangerous infections that, if left untreated, can spread throughout the body.[4]
- **Dental coverage can reduce the cost of oral health care for children:**
  - Mothers can spread oral bacteria to their babies, putting baby at risk for developing tooth decay. Reducing bacteria in a mother's mouth through dental care during pregnancy significantly reduces her risk of developing oral diseases and spreading decay-causing bacteria to her baby.[5]
  - A child is four times more likely to visit a dentist if a parent visits a dentist. If that child begins preventive dental care by age one, dental care costs during preschool years will be 40% lower.[6] Less than 24% of children enrolled in Virginia Medicaid have a dental visit by age one.[7]
  - Reducing tooth decay in early childhood can reduce the need for children to receive costly dental treatment in the operating room under general anesthesia. In 2011, Virginia Medicaid spent $7 million treating dental issues in the operating room.[8,9,10]
- **Dental coverage can reduce the number of pre-term and low-birth weight babies:**
  - Higher levels of hormones, dietary changes and vomiting during pregnancy put pregnant women at a higher risk for cavities and periodontal disease.[11]
  - Pregnant women with periodontal disease may be up to eight times more likely to deliver prematurely, and over 18% of preterm low birth weight babies may be attributable to periodontal disease.[12,13]
  - The average costs during the first year of life for a preterm baby are more than ten times that of a baby born at full term; the cost of an average preterm birth is $50,000 in the first year of life.[14]
  - More than 25% of all pregnant women have periodontal disease.[15,16] Managing periodontal disease requires comprehensive treatment procedures such as scaling and root planing in addition to preventive care.

For more information, contact Sarah Holland, Executive Director of the Virginia Oral Health Coalition, at sholland@vaoralhealth.org or 804.269.8721.

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