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For the Media

## **Research Presented Today Provides Further Evidence on the Importance of Good Oral Health in Pregnant Women**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 7, 2000 – The more of the mouth affected with periodontal disease, the more likely a woman is to deliver a premature baby, according to an ongoing study of more than 2,000 pregnant women. The results point to further evidence that periodontal disease may be a significant risk factor for preterm births.

Past studies have shown that women with periodontal disease may be up to seven times more likely to deliver a preterm low birth weight baby. Today at the American Academy of Periodontology's Specialty Conference on Periodontal Medicine in Washington, D.C., preliminary research was presented for the first time suggesting that the risk for women who have generalized periodontal disease (meaning it affects at least 30 percent of their mouth) is even higher.

"We were amazed by these findings," said Marjorie Jeffcoat, D.M.D, the study's lead researcher and chair of Periodontics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry. However, women with only a couple of sites in their mouths affected by periodontal disease aren't off the hook. "While there is a definite dose response, the trend for preterm birth was observed in women with as little as two sites with attachment loss (a measure of periodontal disease)," said Jeffcoat.

The women in the study had no other major risk factors for preterm birth, including genitourinary infections, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption. In the United States, about 25 percent of preterm births occur without any known risk factors.

"Low birth weight is a major public health problem in our country," said **Jack Caton**, D.D.S., M.S., president of the American Academy of Periodontology. "It's important that we continue to try to identify risk factors and preventable or treatable conditions that can help reduce the rate of premature births. Continued research into the link between periodontal disease and preterm births will help the medical and dental community provide the best possible care for mothers-to-be."

Jeffcoat also introduced a second component of her research, an intervention trial to look at what happens when periodontal disease is treated in pregnant women. She expects to complete this study next year. "Initial data tells us the best advice continues to be that women considering pregnancy have a periodontal screening and get any problems with their oral health under control before becoming pregnant," said Jeffcoat. However, women who are already pregnant should not shy away from dental care. "I advise periodontists to perform scaling and root planing, along with any supportive therapy, in the second trimester for pregnant patients with periodontal disease," said Jeffcoat.

A referral to a periodontist or a free brochure titled *Women and Periodontal Disease* is available by calling 1-800-FLOSS-EM or visiting the AAP's Web site at [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org).

The AAP is a 7,000-member organization of dentists specializing in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of tissues surrounding the teeth and in the placement of dental implants. Periodontics is one of nine dental specialties recognized by the American Dental Association.

For more information, contact the AAP Public Affairs Department at 312/573-3243 or 312/573-3242.

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