

Good Oral Health Improves Overall Health by Jeffrey Forman, MD

There is an undeniable and frequently underestimated link between oral health and overall health. Research demonstrates that poor oral health can have adverse effects on ailments such as diabetes, heart disease, the respiratory system, osteoporosis and the health of newborns and infants.

According to the American Diabetes Association, "People with diabetes are at an increased risk for serious gum disease, because they are generally more susceptible to bacterial infection and have a decreased ability to fight bacteria that invade the gums." Gum disease, similar to other infections, may cause blood glucose levels to rise, making it more difficult to control diabetes.

A study published in the Journal of Periodontology (2011) suggests that "periodontal disease may increase the risk for respiratory infections, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia. These infections, which are caused when bacteria from the upper throat are inhaled into the lower respiratory tract, can be severely debilitating and are one of the leading causes of death in the U.S."

Gum diseases can double a person's chance of developing heart disease. Research suggests that oral bacteria can get into the bloodstream, attach to fat cells in blood vessels, form blood clots and restrict blood flow. There is also a connection between high levels of oral

bacteria and thickening blood vessels.

Additional research shows a correlation between oral infections and the increased risk of pre-term and low-birth weight deliveries. For pregnant women, gum disease may increase the mother's risk of diabetes and high blood

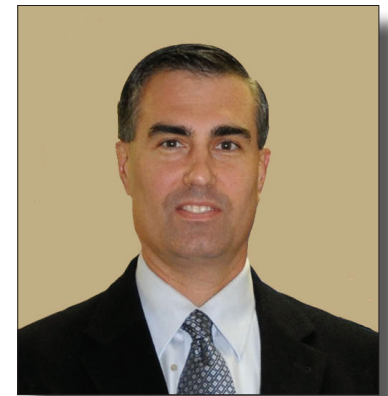
pressure; and nausea and vomiting associated with pregnancy can deteriorate tooth enamel.

"Infants are not immune from cavities. Few people are aware that the bacteria that cause cavities can be transferred to infants easily,"

said Sarah Bedard Holland, Virginia Oral Health Coalition (VaOHC) Executive Director.

The intimate relationship of dental and overall health must compel patients, physicians and dentists to collaborate, recognize problems early and communicate with one another on ways to improve health outcomes.

If you would like more information about oral health and how it relates to overall health, check out the Virginia Oral Health Coalition's website at www.vaoralhealth.org.



Dr. Forman is a member of the Obici Healthcare Foundation.

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Dental Access Points in Western Tidewater

To find a listing of dental clinics in Hampton Roads, visit www.accesspartnership.org. For assistance finding dental services, call Access Partnership's Dental Access Line at (757) 853-8500 ext. 127.

The following is a listing of dental programs in Western Tidewater:

- **Horizon Health Services, Inc. Ivor Family Dental Center**
HOURS: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
8575 Ivor Road
Ivor, VA 23866
757-859-9070
- **Peninsula Institute for Community Health Main Street Physicians**
HOURS: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
157 North Main Street, Suite A
Suffolk, VA 23434
757-925-1866
- **Western Tidewater Free Clinic**
HOURS: Dental services for Free Clinic medical patients only
2019 Meade Parkway
Suffolk, VA 23434
757-923-1060



UNINSURED OBTAIN FREE DENTAL CARE

Nearly 240 people without dental insurance received free oral health services during two Pankey Dental Access Day events conducted in December and May at the Suffolk National Guard Armory.

These opportunities to provide care to the underserved were sponsored by Access Partnership and the Obici Healthcare Foundation.

"As the result of this community-wide collaboration of volunteers and businesses, patients received over \$290,000 worth of dental care," said Gina Pitrone, Foundation Executive Director.