COVID-19: What to Expect When Your Dentist's Office Reopens

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of things about our daily lives. Your regular visits to the dentist have changed, too. In March, the ADA recommended that dentists postpone all but emergency procedures until April 30 at the earliest to help reduce the spread of the virus; save masks gloves and other personal protective equipment and help keep patients who need emergency treatment from going to busy hospital emergency rooms.

Now that this date has passed and states have reopened, dental practices are seeing patients for the full range of dental services.

An October 2020 report published in [The Journal of the American Dental Association](#) found that fewer than one percent of dentists nationwide were found to be COVID-19 positive and 99 percent of dentists were using enhanced infection control procedures such as screening protocols and enhanced disinfection practices when treating patients. The ADA has developed science-based guidance to dentists on extra steps they can take, [in addition to the infection control procedures they've always followed](#), to help protect their patients and staff. Here's what you can expect at your next appointment.

Before Your Appointment

To help make sure that patients arriving for their appointments are healthy, your dental office may call you before your appointment and ask you some questions about your current health. They may also repeat these questions when you arrive to make sure nothing has changed.

Your dentist's office staff may also ask that you limit the number of people you bring to the appointment. That could mean leaving your children at home or allowing older children to go into the office alone while their parent waits outside during their appointment.

At Your Appointment

If your state or city is requiring people to wear masks in public, be sure to wear one to your appointment. When you arrive at the dental office, you may be asked to wait outside until they're ready for you. This will reduce the number of people in the office and reduce the amount of time you're close to other people. When you enter the office, you may have your temperature taken.

Inside the office, you may notice things people often touch in the waiting room – like toys or magazines – have been removed. They may have hand sanitizer available for you to use and may wipe down items you touch, such as pens, clipboards or furniture.

When you're in the dental chair, you may notice some things look different from the last time you were there. The dentist may have covered the computer's keyboard with a disposable cover so it can be easily cleaned between patients, for example. Your dentist may also be using different protective equipment than they've used at previous appointments. This could include different masks, face shields, gowns and goggles. These additional precautions help protect both you and the dentist.

After Your Appointment

After your appointment is over, the staff will thoroughly clean the areas where you've been using disinfectants that are effective against the virus that causes COVID-19 to prepare for the next patient. This helps reduce the risk of illness being passed to others.

If you start feeling ill with the symptoms of COVID-19 within two days of your appointment, call the dental office. You may have already been carrying the virus at the time of your appointment, so anyone who came into contact with you during that time could be at risk for getting sick too.

Remember, regular dental visits are an essential part of your overall heath. Be sure to reschedule your dental checkups once your local authorities allow dental practices to reopen. Your ADA dentist will make sure your visit is as safe as possible for everyone involved.

American Dental Association Responds to World Health Organization Recommendation: Dentistry is Essential Health Care

August 12, 2020

CHICAGO, August 12, 2020 —The American Dental Association (ADA) respectfully yet strongly disagrees with the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation to delay "routine" dental care in certain situations due to COVID-19.

"Oral health is integral to overall health. [Dentistry is essential health care](#)," states ADA President Chad P. Gehani, D.D.S. "Dentistry is essential health care because of its role in evaluating, diagnosing, preventing or treating oral diseases, which can affect systemic health."

Dr. Gehani added that in March, when COVID-19 cases began to rise in the U.S., the ADA called for dentists to postpone all but urgent and emergency care in order to understand the disease, consider its effect on dental patients, dental professionals and the greater community.

Both the [ADA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)](#) then issued interim guidance for dental professionals related to COVID-19. The ADA's guidance calls for the highest level of PPE available—[masks, goggles and face shields](#). The ADA's interim guidance also calls for the use of rubber dams and high velocity suction whenever possible and hand scaling when cleaning teeth rather than using ultrasonic scaling to minimize aerosols.

Dr. Gehani concludes, "Millions of patients have safely visited their dentists in the past few months for the full range of dental services. With appropriate PPE, dental care should continue to be delivered during global pandemics or other disaster situations."