

COVID-19 Practice Guidance for Licensees and Facilities

Alaska Board of Dental Examiners, 11/12/20

The Alaska Board of Dental Examiners wants oral health professionals to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission when seeing patients by using the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and evaluating engineering controls. This document provides recommendations and guidelines as we continue to navigate through the effects of COVID-19. Please keep in mind that proper PPE is not only to protect from patient to patient transmission, but also for occupational protection.

This is a collaborative compilation of guidance from the CDC, OSHA, and other sources. It is not all inclusive, however, it is meant to provide additional guidance to providers as they treat patients during this transitional time. The changes from prior practice recommendations may not be forever, and it is too soon to know or speculate, but we want oral health providers to be as safe as possible during this unprecedented time.

Please keep in mind that in this pandemic, we are in a situation of evolving understanding of coronavirus and COVID-19, that these are interim guidelines and guidance, and may change as further evidence is reviewed.

Practitioners are advised to be aware of rates of community transmission in their service area (<https://coronavirus-response-alaska-dhss.hub.arcgis.com>) and mitigate risks accordingly. Each community is unique, and appropriate mitigation strategies will vary based on the level of community transmission, characteristics of the community and its population, and the local capacity to implement strategies. [CDC guidance](#) is available to develop risk mitigating strategies for communities.

I. Applicability: This guidance applies to all dental offices and providers regulated by the Board of Dental Examiners to practice dentistry and dental hygiene in the State of Alaska.

II. Health Care Delivery

Providers and facilities are encouraged to adhere to the following practices when delivering health care:

1. Risk Mitigation Strategies

- a. If the same level of care may be achieved through the use of phone consultation as achieved through in-office service, then this delivery method should be used. If not, an office visit is warranted.
- b. A rigorous screening protocol, [such as the CDC's example](#)ⁱ, which involves both pre-appointment and in-office screenings should be used with each patient for the safety of patients and staff. Patients suspected will be assumed a presumptive positive, or a person under investigation, for COVID-19.
 - i. Temperature may be elevated in the case of an odontogenic infection; consider all other screening questions when elevated temperature is noted, and use professional best judgement.
 - ii. Follow State of Alaska COVID-19 testing guidance when applicable: <http://www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/testing.aspx>
 - iii. Follow all additional CDC state and federal guidance relating to screening for COVID-19 in

symptomatic and asymptomatic patients: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

- c. Testing guidelines for care delivery:
 - i. Molecular-based testing for SARS CoV-2 infection is *strongly recommended* prior to non-emergent aerosolizing procedures. A negative molecular-based test for SARS CoV-2 should ideally be obtained within 48 hours of their procedure due to elevated risk of pre-symptomatic viral shedding within two days prior to symptom onset. Providers may use clinical discretion if meeting this guidance is not possible.
 - ii. Molecular-based testing for SARS CoV-2 infection is *strongly recommended* prior to urgent or emergent dental procedures, to the extent that is reasonably possible after considering available testing capacity and any other relevant constraints.
- d. Each facility should maintain a plan to stop performing procedures permitted by Section II in the event of an outbreak or resurgence of COVID-19 cases or a shortage of PPE (refer to Section II, x-xi).
- e. Throughout the period of resumed elective procedures, reassess every two weeks:
 - i. It is *strongly recommended* that offices consult with an HVAC professional to develop engineering controls to shield dentistry workers, patients, and visitors from potential exposure to SARS-CoV-2. This includes easily decontaminated physical barriers or partitions between patient treatment areas (e.g., curtains separating patients in semi-private areas), as guided by OSHA.
 - ii. Dental offices should maintain a plan to address the potential of a dental healthcare worker contracting SARS-CoV-2.
 - 1. https://success.ada.org/~media/CPS/Files/COVID/A_Positive_COVID-19_Test_Result_On_Your_Staff.pdf?utm_source=email&utm_medium=morning_huddle&utm_content=cv-pm-positive-test-result-on-staff&utm_campaign=covid-19
 - 2. Facilities and practices should have a plan in place for patient isolation, per [OSHA](#) guidance, in the case of a suspected or positive COVID-19 case.
- f. It is the responsibility of each provider to ensure the safety of their staff and patients. This includes ensuring providers and staff do not come to work while ill, minimizing travel of providers and staff, and providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

All staff should be screened and their temperature should be taken at the beginning of each shift, and those displaying respiratory symptoms or fever ($\geq 100^{\circ}$ F) should immediately leave and pursue SARS-CoV-19 testing.

- g. Prioritize procedures based on whether their continued delay will have a significant adverse health outcome. Strongly consider the balance of risks vs. benefits for patients in higher-risk groups. Persons over age 60 and those of any age with serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. These include but are not limited to those with compromised immune systems, diabetes, hypertension, chronic kidney disease, lung and heart function problems.

To mitigate risk for high-risk groups, consider delaying routine care if appropriate, or scheduling these patients for dental care at the first appointment of the day. Non-emergent and elective

procedures should be prioritized based on indication and urgency. Providers may reference the CDC's [Framework for provision of non-COVID-10 health care during the COVID-19 pandemic, by potential for patient harm and degree of community transmission.](#)

- h. Every effort shall be taken to minimize potential of dental aerosols and spatter in delivery of care.

Aerosol generating procedures include but are not limited to:

- **The use of a dental handpiece, whether intra-oral or extra-oral.**
 - **The use of an ultrasonic scaler (e.g., Cavitron)**
 - **The simultaneous spray of compressed air and water into the oral cavity; air/water syringe use.**
 - **Use of lasers, electro-surge or any similar device creating a vapor**
 - **Use of intra-oral air-polishing or air-abrasion unit**
- i. **High-Volume Evacuation (HVE) should be used if an aerosol is generated.** HVE is defined as an evacuator with a single lumen of at least 8mm that will evacuate one liter of fluid in one minute. Perforated attachments such as Iso-Lite, Dry-Shield etc. which are attached to the HVE hose do not meet this requirement.
- ii. Unless contraindicated, utilize the following to further mitigate risks of dental aerosols:
1. Preprocedural mouth rinses (PPMR): There is no published evidence regarding the clinical effectiveness of PPMRs to reduce SARS-CoV-2 viral loads or to prevent transmission. Although SARS-CoV-2 was not studied, PPMRs with an antimicrobial product (chlorhexidine gluconate, essential oils, povidone-iodine or cetylpyridinium chloride) may reduce the level of oral microorganisms in aerosols and spatter generated during dental procedures.
 2. Use of dental isolation devices such as dental dams or isolating- type mouth props when possible can help mitigate aerosols, but are not substitutes for HVE.
 3. Utilize low-aerosol techniques such as hand scaling in dental hygiene procedures.
- i. Infection control should be practiced in all patient-accessed areas:
- i. Consult [CDC Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation](#) when re-opening offices.
 - ii. It is *strongly recommended* to place plastic or other barriers in between open air operatories to decrease the risk of aerosol into other areas of the facility and to isolate the room(s) ([OSHA guidance](#)).
 - iii. Unused supplies and instruments should be in covered storage, such as drawers and cabinets, and away from potential contamination. Any supplies and equipment that are exposed but not used during a procedure should be considered contaminated and should be disposed of or reprocessed properly after completion of the procedure.
 - iv. It is *strongly recommended* to use HEPA filtration in the operatories to provide further protection from airborne particles. Further guidance is available from OSHA. Consult with your HVAC provider to seek further advice on where your facility currently stands with air exchange in operatories and practice.
 - v. Decrease caseload volume to maximize social distancing. It is *strongly recommended* to limit clinical care to one patient at a time whenever possible.

- vi. Stagger appointment times to reduce waiting room exposure.
- vii. Stagger use of operatories, in multiple-operatory facilities, to allow additional time between patients for aerosol settling and cleaning in rooms.

To [clean and disinfect the dental operatory after a patient with COVID-19](#), DHCP should delay entry into the operatory until a [sufficient time has elapsed](#) for enough air changes to remove potentially infectious particles.

- viii. The [CDC recommends](#) careful consideration of patient orientation, and placement of the patient’s head near the return air vents, away from pedestrian corridors, and towards the rear wall when using vestibule-type office layouts when possible.
- ix. Implement social distancing measures within waiting rooms and other areas of the office.
- x. Post [visual alerts](#) (e.g., signs, posters) at the entrance and in strategic places (e.g., waiting areas, elevators, break rooms) to provide instructions in the appropriate language(s) about hand and respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette. Instructions should include wearing a cloth face covering or facemask for source control, and how and when to perform hand hygiene.
- xi. Provide supplies for respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, such as alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) with 60– 95% alcohol, tissues, and no-touch receptacles for disposal, at healthcare facility entrances, waiting rooms, and patient check-ins.
- xii. Consider consult with an HVAC professional for installation of physical barriers (e.g., glass or plastic windows) at reception areas to limit close contact between triage personnel and potentially infectious patients.
- xiii. Ideally, have patients wait outside the facility, when outdoor conditions permit, instead of waiting areas to prevent inadvertent spread and contact patients when their room is ready.
- xiv. Patients should wear a cloth face covering in waiting rooms and other patient-accessed areas at all times, except when undergoing active dental work.
- xv. Remove all magazines and/or toys to prevent contamination.
- xvi. No paper material of any kind should be in the operatory during treatment that produces/utilizes sprays or aerosols.
- xvii. Clean and disinfect common areas (door handles, lobby, countertops, restrooms) frequently throughout the day.
- xviii. Wipe items a patient uses after use (pens, iPad’s etc.)
- xix. At time of patient discharge, request that the patient inform the dental facility if they develop symptoms or are diagnosed with COVID-19 within 48 hours following their appointment.

2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- a. All oral health care delivered by providers defined in statute and listed in Section I shall deploy universal masking procedures in coordination with the facility infection control program. This may be a combination of cloth face coverings for employees not present for the provision of services or procedures (billing/front desk staff); and surgical masks for those involved in non-aerosolizing direct- patient care. Donning and doffing guidance may be found at the CDC’s [Using Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) page. At this time, the standard should be to provide the highest level of PPE that is available:
 - i. Successfully fit-tested NIOSH-certified, disposable N95 filtering facepiece respirator,

PAPR, or KN95 for aerosol-producing procedures as required by OSHA (note: [temporary discretion](#) regarding annual fit test enforcement requirement has been issued by OSHA regarding mask wear during the COVID-19 pandemic) .

Given the shortage of N95 masks, wearing an N95 covered with an ASTM Level III mask and/or a face shield can help to prevent droplets and/or splatter on the N95 mask. With this technique, the N95 mask may be repeatedly used.

- ii. If a respirator (N95 or KN95) is not available, oral health professionals could use a combination of an ASTM Level III mask and a full-face shield. Please see mask guidance below regarding risk levels.
 - 1. [CDC Guidance](#)
 - 2. [ADA Understanding Masks](#)
 - 3. [ADA Interim Mask and Face Shield Guidelines](#)
- iii. Dental providers completing non-aerosolizing procedures with a potential to generate spatter will wear PPE of surgical mask, face shields, and safety glasses or loupes, at a minimum. Goggles may be substituted for a face shield and glasses.
- iv. Gloves should be worn by all staff involved in direct patient care, and soiled gloves should be changed and discarded immediately.
- v. Gowns should be worn; soiled gowns should be changed or disposed of between patients. Gowns used during aerosolizing procedures should be
 - 1. discarded after use if disposable, or
 - 2. laundered after each use if non- disposable.
- vi. Any apparel that comes in contact with the patient or patient environment should be removed prior to exiting the building and should be laundered after daily use.
- vii. Long sleeve garments which fit snugly at the wrist should be worn.

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- 3. The dental office should have enough recommended PPE in inventory for its workforce for 2 weeks without the need for emergency PPE- conserving measures. If an office experiences an inability to source PPE for a period of one week, the office should close for non-emergent procedures until sufficient PPE has been obtained. If a facility proposes to extend the use of or reuse PPE, it should follow [CDC guidance](#).

III. Other Considerations -Applies to Sections I and II

Travel for medical procedures and health care services qualifies as a "critical personal need". Be aware of travel guidance for your local community and for the State of Alaska.