

## **ADA: FAQ's Related to Communicating with Patients and Staff**

### **Questions regarding communicating with patients**

#### **What questions should we ask our patients in order to identify their symptoms and decide whether to cancel an appointment?**

The ADA recommends updating a patient's medical history at each visit. These screening questions may be asked when confirming appointments or when the patient presents for treatment. Appropriate questions to screen patients for coronavirus could include asking if the patient has traveled internationally in the last 14 days or has been in close contact with another person who has been diagnosed with or under investigation for COVID-19, and whether the patient has a cough, fever or shortness of breath.

Encourage patients who respond "yes" to those questions to contact their primary physician or public health department as soon as possible to determine if they should be seen or tested.

#### **What should we do if we suspect a patient has COVID-19? Do we notify the local or state health department?**

Contact your local health department immediately if you suspect a patient has COVID-19. You can also contact your state health department.

HIPAA's Privacy Rule allows covered entities to disclose needed protected health information to public health authority responding to a public health emergency.

#### **What if a patient has the virus, but urgently needs dental treatment? How do we proceed to provide care?**

If a patient with a confirmed case of COVID-19 requires urgent dental treatment, the dentist and the patient's medical providers should work together to determine the appropriate precautions on a case-by-case basis: this coordinated approach is critical in order to ensure that the risk of potential spread of disease among patients, visitors, and staff is kept as low as possible.

Because dental settings are not typically designed to carry out all of the Transmission-Based Precautions that are recommended for hospital and other ambulatory care settings, dentists and medical providers will need to determine whether the facility is an appropriate setting for the necessary services for a potentially infectious patient. It may be necessary for treatment to be performed in a healthcare setting that offers the additional protections that should be maintained in these cases.

### **Questions regarding maintaining the practice's physical environment**

Should we ask patients to wait in their cars until we can treat them so they aren't sitting in crowded waiting rooms or reception areas?

The CDC recommends using “social distancing” whenever possible as an effective way of decreasing the likelihood of transmitting coronavirus. On March 7, 2020, the agency updated its definition of social distancing to mean “remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible.”

With that advice in mind, consider implementing these steps in your practice:

- ask patients to arrive on time for their appointments, rather than too early, since that will minimize the amount of time they spend in your waiting room or reception area
- remove magazines, reading materials, toys and other objects that may be touched by others and which are not easily disinfected
- schedule appointments to minimize possible contact with other patients in the waiting room

**Should we have glass partitions between the front office staff and the waiting room when possible to decrease the risk of staff exposure?**

While physical barriers may reduce or eliminate exposure to coronavirus, installing glass partitions may not be feasible in all practices.

**Questions regarding communicating with staff**

**Since coronavirus can spread via aerosol transmission, should my staff be using scaling instruments or hand pieces any differently than we usually do?**

Every procedure and every patient is unique. Appropriate personal protective equipment should be available when instruments that produce an aerosol are used and it’s a good idea to consider using high speed evacuation in those cases since aerosol spread is one way that coronavirus can be transmitted. Of course, since no single answer can apply to every possible situation, dentists and hygienists should use their best professional judgment to determine what instrumentation should be needed for a particular procedure.

**I’ve seen a lot of information about managing patient exposures: what should we do if there’s a case of potential or actual employee exposure?**

Follow the same procedures you would with a patient suspected to have, or confirmed to have, COVID-19: report the individual to your local health department and/or state health department. Those agencies will conduct any appropriate follow-up.