



Dental is Essential: Visiting the Dentist During COVID-19

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As practicing dentists, we've recently been asked by family, friends, and patients if it's safe to go back to the dentist for routine preventive care right now. Most dental practices across the country have reopened for non-emergent visits with careful guidance from the American Dental Association (ADA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and their local health officials.

The truth is, dentists have kept patients safe from germs, viruses, and illnesses long before COVID-19. Many of the cleaning and disinfection guidelines other businesses are now following have long been common practice for your dentist. As medical professionals who manage infection control and risk on a daily basis, dentists adhere to specific safety protocols such as:

- Sterilizing equipment.
- Disinfecting surfaces.
- Wearing masks when in close contact with patients.

Choosing when to return to the dentist is a personal choice, and it's important to keep in mind that routine dental exams are critical to good oral health and overall wellness. More than 90% of all systemic diseases are linked to oral health, and poor oral health can lead to and escalate serious overall health issues. Additionally, a [new study](#) found that poor oral hygiene could be associated with the severity of COVID-19. Inadequate oral hygiene can increase the risk of inter-bacterial exchanges between the lungs and the mouth, increasing the risk of respiratory infections.

Dental professionals are essential to our wellbeing, especially during this time of heightened focus on the importance of overall health. So if you are ready to visit your dental provider, what are your next steps and what should you expect?

Contact your Dental Provider

Your dentist is the best resource for up-to-date information on their practice and the guidelines they're following. If you don't have a dental home, many dentists are accepting new patients and are willing to speak with you over the phone or via a telehealth examination.

Make an Appointment

Don't wait to schedule your next appointment for any dental concerns or preventive care. Oral health is connected to overall health, which is why it's important to keep up with preventive exams, especially if you're pregnant or have a chronic medical condition that puts you at higher risk for dental problems. Keep in mind that most dental practices are still catching up from months of rescheduled appointments and are most likely operating on limited time slots because of social-distancing requirements and additional time required for cleaning between patients.

The “New Normal”

The process before and during your appointment may feel different than it did before, but rest assured it's to ensure your safety and the safety of the dental team. You may be asked to wait in your car, you may not get to see the familiar smile from the dental team because they're wearing masks, and your appointment times may vary in duration. You also may want to consider getting more necessary dentistry done during each visit as opposed to spreading the treatment out over multiple visits.

Before your appointment:

- To minimize the number of people in the office, you may be asked to leave family members or caregivers at home unless it's necessary for them to accompany you.
- You may be asked screening questions to make sure you don't have any COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever or cough) and to confirm you have not been in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- You may be asked to complete paperwork at home and submit electronically before your appointment.

Appointment day:

- You may be asked to wait in your car until the staff is ready, and they will call or text you when it's time to come in.
- If they're using them, reception rooms will have fewer chairs and no magazines or toys.
- Upon arrival, you may have your temperature taken and be asked to wear a mask.
- Front office staff will be wearing face masks.
- You may be asked additional screening questions about COVID-19 symptoms.
- You may see additional dividers at the front desk and throughout the office.
- You may need to wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before treatment.
- Treatment may be modified to reduce aerosols. For example, the hygienist may hand-polish your teeth instead of ultrasonic cleaning.

Venturing out of the house may seem daunting, but dental offices have always been safe places to receive care, and they are committed to keeping you and your family safe.

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