**Now is the Time to Visit Your Dentist**

With so many routine outings placed on hold during the pandemic, it might seem like the dentist is just another place to avoid until things are back to “normal.” A recent survey of dentists conducted by the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute shows that many patients are experiencing an increase in a variety of oral health issues due to COVID-19 stress, including chipped or cracked teeth, teeth grinding, jaw pain, as well as tooth decay and gum disease. The longer a dental concern is ignored, the more likely it will continue to develop into chronic pain or oral disease.

Dental offices are one of the safest places to go during the COVID-19 pandemic, as dentists have been combatting infectious diseases for decades and have implemented extra safety measures during the pandemic. Thanks to these extra infection control precautions, there has been no evidence of COVID-19 transmission in a dental office.

“Infection control is nothing new to dental offices,” said Dr. Nathan Hehr, president of the Iowa Dental Association and practicing partner of Nettleton Dental Group in Mason City. “Requirements released by the Iowa Dental Board in light of the pandemic reinforce the standards dental offices are already accustomed to, with the addition of stricter requirements that allow for safe practicing amidst a disease that is largely unknown. Patients are actually safer at the dental office than the grocery store.”

Further, a recent study conducted by the University of Iowa College of Dentistry found that even in dental procedures where a lot of aerosol is generated, the amount of aerosol particles that spread to other areas of the office or remain in the office are very low. With the mitigation efforts dental offices have in place to prevent against aerosol spread, there is no reason to be more concerned visiting the dentist than any other location you may already be frequenting.

In fact, millions of patients nationally have already returned safely to their dentist for a full range of dental services. With no evidence of COVID-19 transmission in dental offices and alarming evidence of an increase in untreated dental issues, it is better for your overall health to schedule a dental appointment and get back to the dentist for routine care. Check in with a friend or family member who has seen the dentist to help alleviate any lingering concerns. Of course, you can always contact your dentist, and they will likely be more than happy to explain everything they are doing to keep you safe, and, most importantly, healthy.