

Dental Advisory Team Issues Guidelines on Public Health Order Compliance

As we reported on Friday, the new health order does not differ very much from the language that has governed dental offices during the last six months. Dental offices provide essential services and should continue to be open during the shelter-at-home order. The order also, however, does not mean business as usual. As health care providers we should continue to be responsible for the overall health of our patients and staff, as well as their dental health. During a shelter-at-home order there is a responsibility for offices to not only provide essential services in a safe environment, but also help people to stay home, if they can. The public health order relies on professionals, like us, to make the right call.

The Dental Advisory Team met to consider the new health order and made some recommendations:

- 1) Take the surging number of cases seriously and respond accordingly. We have supplied tools and guidance on how to do this but are leaving it to your professional judgement to decide the right plan for your practice. The situation is 10 times worse now than it was just a few weeks ago. As health care providers, you should consider what that means for your daily activities. The actions you take today in your office may affect your practices ability to continue to function during the pandemic.
- 2) It is inevitable that as numbers go up, there will be asymptomatic staff and patients that will enter more practices. We've seen it already to an alarming degree. The measures you are taking may suddenly be under more critical scrutiny. This is a time for you or your staff to be particularly vigilant about compliance. Refamiliarize yourself and staff with CDC and ADA guidelines for safe practice in this environment. As always, staff with any symptoms that might be attributed to COVID-19 should not enter the office and potentially expose others.
- 3) Consider carefully how your practices are compliant with both the letter and the spirit of the public health order. If you were asked to justify what you were doing as essential, are you prepared? The Team is recommending that you think about that carefully and write it down now.
- 4) Each practice needs to consider what their essential care plan should be based on their individual situation. For example, if cancelling hygiene patients means that they will not be seen for months, they should probably not be cancelled. If you could delay some patients and see them within a couple weeks without affecting their health, perhaps that is a time to consider the delay and let staff stay home.
- 5) Talk with your staff. Help them understand that what they are doing is essential too. If your staff doesn't feel comfortable working during this time, consider other opportunities. Are there things that some could do from home? The shelter-at-home order affects them both at home and at the office.
- 6) Review the reopening guidelines to make sure you can continue to provide essential care safely. Taking extra precautions and prioritizing the care of your patients is an important part of being essential.

We stress, as the ADA has stated, that your continued practice is essential. The care your patients receive is essential. We believe you can do this safely in the current environment. We encourage you to follow the guidance in the Workplace Safety Toolkit. Your safety, and that of your team and patients is our priority.