

# Reopen Dental Office Post COVID-19

## Looking to the Future in Dentistry

The COVID virus has been extremely difficult for all of us. Beyond the devastation to people's health and well-being, dental offices are experiencing complete shutdowns in some places.

This will lead to poorer health over time since good oral hygiene is directly linked to better overall health.

As dentists, we need to prepare for a new "future" in dentistry for the time being. The proper time to reopen involves many factors.

- State regulations, practice location
- Outbreak significance in your area
- Emergency dentistry provided
- Dental team health
- Employee availability

All these factors need to be considered before the decision to reopen or "soft" reopen is made.

In the meantime, dental practices and dentists need to prepare for the new polices they will need to put into place to begin seeing patient's again.

Here are 10 points to consider and implement to protect yourself, your team and your patients. Please share your thoughts and ideas to help others in the dental profession work toward a safe reopen process.

## 10 Points to Consider when Reopening Dental Office

1. **Patient Communication:** Most Important Step. Explain how the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Works to every patient.
2. **Stagger Patients:** Do not stack dental appointments – Ramp-up slowly. Only use chairs 1-3-5.
3. **Change Appointment Confirmation Style:** Explain new safety policies over phone appointment confirmation calls. Ask if patient has any symptoms of fever.
4. **Modified Patient Check-In:** Reception room is closed. Check-in is done over the phone. Patients wait to be called-in for appointment once previous patient is gone and sanitation is complete.
5. **Office entry Restricted:** Only patients may enter office for appointment. Spouses, friends caregivers and parents need to wait outside. They can assist patient to the front door and hand off to sensitization technician.
6. **Remove Non-essential Items:** Any non-clinical items should be stored. Dental display models, flyers, brochures, nightguard samples implant displays, etc.

7. **Dental Supply Deliveries:** All supply deliveries from package carriers or dental suppliers must be accepted outside and sanitized once in practice.
8. **Contain all Aerosol Spray:** Use rubber dam to contain spray. Dental Hygienists should have a dental assistant help them and use a high volume ejector (HVE) for hygiene procedures.
9. **Sanitization Technician / Environmental Dental Assistant:** A new dental position. A roaming dental assistant is most qualified for this new job. They are responsible for sanitizing all areas of concern.
10. **Take Patient Temperatures:** Most difficult for dentists. You are not diagnosing or recommending medical steps to the patient based on temperature. You are simply protecting yourself, your team and your patients.

## **COVID-19 Communication in Dental Practices**

This is a fluid and evolving situation. When these situations exist communication with your dental team and patients is the most important thing to constantly have.

Refining the process, you use to reopen will be different for offices 5 to 1000 miles away. The ten steps above are a guide or “rough draft” to reference for reopening a dental practice.

Once you determine the proper steps that fit your practice the next phase is to try a “soft opening”.

### **“Soft-Opening” a Dental Practice**

We have to start somewhere. Dental practices are not going to be closed forever. Protecting your patients is the most important thing. Protecting them from COVID-19 is essential.

Maintaining their oral health is also important. Using the following dental protocols can help you “soft open” or test how the new procedures can work for your practice.

### **Urgent Patients Only**

Defined as patients who require, in the treating dentist opinion, urgent care.

A dental procedure that was recommended a month or two ago will become urgent.

- Only see 5 hygiene patients per day (1 Patient every 90 minutes). Have a dental assistant assigned to High Volume Suction for the hygienist to eliminate aerosol spray.
- For dental procedures add an additional 20-30 minutes per patient, per procedure to help mitigate any contamination and allow for the best patient/team management

## **Guidelines for Practice**

All employees will wear PPE.

This includes a mask, gown, gloves, face shield and shoe covering.

### **Patient & Employee Protocols:**

All patients must be called prior to their office in order to inform them of the mandatory protocols

### **Dental Team Protocols for Office Visits**

- Patients and/or their Parent/Guardian “Check-In” from their car upon arrival at the office
- The Patient and/or their Guardian/Parent will wait in the car until the office calls the patient into the office
- The patient (if a minor) will be escorted to the office door by the parent/guardian.
- Only the patient is allowed in the office
- The Parent/Guardian will “Hand-Off” their minor child to the dental auxiliary at the door
- Proper Patient protection will be at the door for the patient to put on before entering the office
- Protective gear, mask and gloves will be provided
- The temperature of every patient will be taken before they come into the office

Patient must be cleared by the Office Administrator to enter the Dental Office.

### **First Patient Interaction:**

- A “greeter” (sterilization tech) from the office will escort the patient directly to the treatment area/chair (after hand sanitizer)

### **Patient Post Treatment:**

- Upon completion of the dental service, the patient’s guardian/parent will be notified by phone to come to the front door.

- The Patient will use hand sanitizer when leaving the office (They use it twice; arrival and departure) if needed (they should be wearing gloves)
- The patient will be “Handed-off” to their parent/Guardian who is outside by the door and NOT in the office
- If a payment is required, the patient will be required to make the payment before leaving the office
- A follow up appointment will be given at the time of payment

### **End of Day: Dental Team Procedures**

- Please remove disposable lab coat before you remove your gloves
- If desired, please bring a change of clothing to change into and properly store your garments in a plastic bag so you can wash when you return home
- After you dispose of you PPE please wash your hand with soap and water for at least 45 second

### **Sterilization Tech:**

After each visit every place the patient goes will be wiped down with surface disinfectant.

If a follow up appointment was not made please make an appointment over the phone while the patient or guardian/parent is in their car.

## **Reason to Soft-Open**

Patients need care and the need for care will continue to increase as optional dental procedures become critical over time.

Dentists need to teach themselves and their team how to start treating patients in the new era of COVID-19.

There will no longer be a 100% safe certainty but every patient that enters your dental practice should be considered to be a COVID patient. This way your protocols and procedures protect everyone.

The same as the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. When every patient that enters a dental office is treated like they have the virus team members follow procedures to protect themselves.

As doctors and healthcare professionals, dental offices are the most prepared to keep patients safe and reopen. They already have been following Federal and State infection controls procedures for decades.

The reason to “soft open” is to help patients and find out which safety protocols work for you and your team.