



WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE DENTIST DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Taking good care of your teeth and gums – brushing your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, flossing daily, drinking fluoridated water, and visiting your dentist regularly – is important because your oral health affects your general health. Poor oral health exacerbates diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and aspiration pneumonia – all conditions that can put you at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19.

Regular dental visits are important, even during a pandemic. Most dental offices in Maryland are open and seeing patients. To keep patients safe, dentists have made changes to their practices, which means your next dental visit may be a bit different from previous visits. Some common changes are outlined below so you know what to expect and can feel comfortable going to the dentist.

Before your appointment:

- Before scheduling your appointment, dental staff may ask you a series of questions to determine if you have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- You may have fewer appointment options. This is because dental staff need additional time to properly disinfect treatment rooms between patients and maintain social distancing in waiting areas.
- Your dentist is working to keep you safe, and may send you a letter or e-mail outlining changes they've made to keep patients safe and control infection. Do not be afraid to ask any questions you may have about their procedures.
- You may be asked to sign a consent form to give your dentist permission to treat you.
- If you are concerned about going to the dental office, ask if your dentist is scheduling televisits. Teledentistry, most often provided through a video appointment with your dentist, enables your dentist to view a dental problem in your mouth, triage dental conditions, and address urgent dental issues – all without your having to go into the office.

When you arrive at the dentist's office:

- You may be asked to call your dentist's office when you arrive for your appointment.
- You may be asked to remain in your car until you are instructed to enter the office.
- Dental staff may check you in for your appointment over the phone. They may ask you questions to see if you have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. They may also ask you if you are having any dental pain or other issues that need the attention of your dentist.

At the entrance to the dental office:

- Dental staff may take your temperature with a touchless thermometer.
- Dental staff may ask a series of questions to see if you have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Dental staff may ask you to wear a mask. If you do not have a mask, one may be provided.
- Family or friends may be asked to wait outside. Most dental offices will only allow essential caregivers (such as the parent of a minor child or the caregiver of a person with a disability) to accompany patients into the dental office.

- If you are wearing gloves, you may be asked to remove them.
- Most dental offices will have hand sanitizer available for you to use before entering.

In the waiting room:

- There may be markers on the floor to help you maintain proper social distancing. Chairs may be spaced six feet apart.
- Toys and magazines may have been removed from the waiting room, as they are difficult to clean and disinfect.
- Front desk staff will wear masks and talk to you through a clear barrier.

During your appointment:

- Avoid handshakes or other touching not necessary for treatment.
- If possible, only the patient will be allowed in the treatment room.
- Your dentist may ask you to rinse your mouth with a hydrogen peroxide rinse before beginning your treatment.
- All dental staff in the treatment room will wear a mask and gloves. Your dentist will likely wear a gown, respirator, surgical mask, face shield, surgical cap/hair cover, and gloves.
- Your treatment may be slightly different. For example, if you are having your teeth cleaned, your hygienist may use hand instruments rather than tools that create aerosols.

After your appointment:

- Your dental office may have touchless payment processing, or let you make payments over the phone.
- Your dentist may ask you to report any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 that you experience within 14 days of your dental appointment.

How your dentist works to protect you:

- Staff are encouraged to stay at home if they feel sick.
- At the beginning of each day, all dental staff complete health assessments and temperature checks.
- All dental clinicians have full personal protective equipment, including face shields, masks, safety goggles, disposable gowns, gloves, and surgical caps/hair covers.
- All staff receive on-going training on CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), and ADA (American Dental Association) recommendations and protocols.
- All surfaces are cleaned and disinfected between patients.
- Clean air systems are positioned throughout the office to help cleanse the air and reduce aerosols.

Adapted from Oral Health Kansas Guide to Dental Visits after COVID Outbreak.