

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) is pleased to make this publication available to our member dentists as a way of communicating important oral health information to their patients.

Information in **WORD OF MOUTH** articles comes from dental health care professionals of the MDS and other leading professional dental organizations, including the American Dental Association. If you have any questions about specific content that may affect your oral health, please contact your dentist. For more information regarding oral health, please visit the Public Resources section of the MDS website at massdental.org.

Your comments and suggestions regarding **WORD OF MOUTH** are always welcome. All correspondence may be sent to:

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It's Safe to Go to the Dentist During COVID-19

Since the COVID-19 pandemic first hit the United States in early 2020, our lives have changed dramatically. Quarantine lockdowns have forced many of us to switch on a dime to working from home and learning virtually. We've bought our groceries online and ordered takeout to help local restaurants stay afloat. We've worn face masks, washed our hands, and used hand sanitizer. We've followed social distancing guidelines and stayed home, canceling in-person playdates, family gatherings, and large holiday celebrations. We've done all this to help slow the spread of the coronavirus so that we can protect our community, our loved ones, and ourselves. Still, many of us have dealt with the immeasurable loss of family members and friends to the virus or battled COVID-19 ourselves, and faced the unknown fear of what contracting the virus could do to us, especially those at risk with other serious health conditions. Fear of contracting COVID-19 has been a big influencer in the past year, and for good reason. However, the Massachusetts Dental Society wants to let residents know that you shouldn't let that fear force you to overlook your oral health. It is safe to go to the dentist right now, even for routine cleaning and exams. Your teeth and gums hold important clues to other health issues (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, premature births, and osteoporosis), so delaying your routine dental care could be detrimental to your oral and overall health.

This guidance is echoed by both the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Dental Association (ADA). Since dentists in Massachusetts began reopening their practices for non-emergency appointments in June 2020, they have been following new enhanced health and safety protocols, such as:

- Following daily patient volume limits
- Screening patients in advance of care
- Requiring masks for all patients, companions, and staff
- Enforcing social distancing measures, as well as minimizing time in waiting areas and contact between patients through scheduling modifications
- Allowing sufficient time in between patients to remove airborne contaminants and thoroughly clean and disinfect the rooms and equipment
- Adhering to all other CDC requirements and Massachusetts reopening guidelines

While going to the dentist may look different than it did at your last appointment prior to COVID-19, dental professionals have always been required to complete extensive and ongoing training in infection control.

A study conducted last summer by the ADA revealed that less than 1% of dentists have contracted COVID-19 at work, and there have been no reported instances of COVID-19 transmission taking place in a dental office. These results support the effectiveness of the infection control recommendations from the ADA and CDC in helping to keep dental professionals and patients as safe as possible.

It's important that you not let your oral health lapse. Delaying routine visits could lead to minor oral health problems becoming chronic or emergency conditions, so it is important to keep in touch with your dentist about any symptoms you may be experiencing between your semiannual appointments. Learn more at massdental.org/safe-dental-care. You can also call your dentist, who will be more than happy to tell you about the office protocols designed to ensure your safety.

