

Hawaii Dental Association Issues Suggested Guidance for Return to Work April 24, 2020

I. BACKGROUND

On March 16th and April 8th, 2020, the HDA issued support of ADA's and CDC's recommendations that dental offices postpone elective procedures and only deliver emergency care. Many of you heeded that call, to follow social distancing guidelines, to conserve PPE, to minimize visits to the ERs, and to flatten the curve. We know how incredibly difficult that was, for your patients, your practice, your staff, and your family. Your voluntary decision to do so significantly helped to keep Hawaii's cases down and our community safe – *our sincerest thanks* for prioritizing our community's health and safety.

As we near April 30th, the deadline set by Gov. David Ige and the ADA, many of you are wondering about Returning to Work. And rightly so – we will continue to live with COVID-19 and the unknowns it brings for some time, but we need to get back to our patients because we know *any further delays will simply add to the ongoing public health crisis.*

To that end, you may have heard that the ADA has convened an [ADA Advisory Task Force on Dental Practice Recovery](#) – they will be releasing their recommendations shortly. Be sure to check [ADA's Coronavirus](#) website regularly for updates.

In reviewing the federal (ADA and CDC) and state guidelines and orders, the HDA issues the following suggested guidance for a safe return to work in the midst of COVID-19. Safely returning to work would be done in phases, and is dependent on available COVID-19 data, the ability to secure much-needed PPE, updated guidelines from public health experts, and new or additional local and state orders. It does *not mean a return to business "as usual" or to pre-COVID-19 times* because as we all know, COVID-19 has ultimately changed how we live, work, and practice.

Only governmental regulations and mandates have the force of law. The ADA and HDA are here to serve our members and to provide recommendations and resources; we are non-regulatory bodies and we do not dispense legal advice. Dentists and their staff are required to follow rules set forth by OSHA, CDC, Hawaii Department of Health, and the Hawaii State Board of Dentistry.

Currently, the county and state Stay at Home orders consider dentists as "critical essential healthcare providers" and are therefore exempt from these orders. However, please keep in mind that these orders are meant to limit human movement and to allow for such movement *only* as necessary.

- Therefore, the HDA recommends that Hawaii dentists return to work in a manner *consistent* with local and state orders, adhering to established public health guidelines, and in phases that are deemed safe, cautious, and methodical.

II. FRAMEWORK for SUGGESTED GUIDANCE to RETURN TO WORK

The health and safety of our members, their staff and patients, and the Hawaii community are our top priority. *All decisions and actions must be made with their health and safety in mind.*

The professional and clinical judgment of the dentists is paramount. No one knows the patient's oral health history better than the treating dentist.

COVID-19 has taught all of us that “what was business as usual” is no longer. We may wish to go back to pre-COVID-19 days but with so many unknowns and such frequent (sometimes daily) changes, we all need to make adjustments in our personal and professional lives. It is not a matter of which changes we wish to make; but rather, “what must we do to meet these changes?”

Currently, there is no COVID-19 testing available at dental offices. The ADA and state government continue to work towards that but until then, all dentists must assume that all patients are positive.

III. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

The shortage of PPE nationwide is unlikely to be resolved in the very immediate future. Organized dentistry continues to advocate for increased production and distribution of much-needed PPE. Until supply meets demand, the supply of PPE in a dental office will impact the number and type of procedures a dentist can deliver to his/her patients. ADA continues actively to advocate with [FEMA](#), the national body tasked with controlling the supply chain of PPE, especially N95 masks, and with other relevant government agencies and individuals.

The ADA is working with reliable domestic manufacturers, key dental distributors and others to increase access to PPE for dental professionals but access to masks and face shields, along with disposable gowns, are currently the hardest to procure, according to distributors.

In addition, the ADA has urged dentists to be cautious about purchasing dental materials from the gray market, as they may not meet certain standards approved by the FDA and ASTM International. The gray market is a generic term that primarily refers to products that are traded or sold outside of the manufacturer’s authorized distribution channels.

If N95 masks are not available, then an ASTM Level 3 surgical mask with a face shield would be the next best selection. Use the highest level of PPE available when treating patients to reduce the risk of exposure. Some risk is inherent in all scenarios. If masks with either goggles or face shields are not available, please understand there is a higher risk for infection; therefore, use your professional judgment related to treatment provided and the patient’s risk factors.

The ADA Advisory Task Force on Dental Practice Recovery continues to work diligently on securing PPE and other Return to Work matters. Read their article [here](#).

IV. SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS for A SAFE RETURN TO WORK

Patient Management:

- Encourage patients to arrive at appointments with face masks on.
- Pre-screen patients for symptoms/history, including conducting temperature checks; a sample of list screening questions is attached.
- Reschedule patients who are sick or show signs of illness.
- Treat patients who are medically compromised and are otherwise vulnerable.
- Offer pre-treatment anti-microbial rinse for all patients without allergy.
- Serve patients by appointments; if a walk-up patient arrives, that patient will be evaluated in the same manner as an appointed patient, provided that the schedule allows for the extra patient.
- Have patients wait in their vehicles or outside (6’ apart), until called or texted in.
- Bring patients into the office by only one staff member.

- When reminding patients of their appointments, staff will inform the patient of the new procedures which include the patient calling the office upon arrival to the office, waiting in the car, and responding to screening questions.

Dental Procedures:

- Use appropriate PPE as recommended by the [ADA](#) and CDC, based on the level of aerosol production including approved respirators, moisture resistant surgical masks, gloves, face shields, eye protection, and disposable garments. The ADA has provided mask and face shield guidelines [here](#).
- Isolate operatories being used for aerosol-generating procedures which may include closing doors or use of dis-infectable drapes.
- Implement aerosol mitigation techniques which may include rubber dams and enhanced evacuation systems.

Implement Social Distancing:

- Modify patient schedules to limit the number of patients and people in the office, to prevent cross-contamination, and to allow for thorough disinfection and adequate social distancing.
- Space chairs apart in the waiting room by 6’.

Office (Re)Design:

- Remove all reading materials and toys.
- Install a barrier at the front desk, such as plexiglass shields or sneeze guards.
- Require staff handling check-ins and check-outs to wear gloves.
- Sanitize credit cards and credit card machines before and after use.
- Consider installing self-service kiosks to handle all administrative activities with patients. If kiosks are used, they must be sanitized after each use by each patient.
- Consider usage of powered air-purifying room air purifiers with high-efficiency particulate arrestance (HEPA) filters.

All Staff:

- Come to work in street clothes - change into scrubs onsite - change out of scrubs before leaving - leave in street clothes. Launder clothes when arriving home.
- Adhere to established guidelines for infection control as mandated by OSHA and CDC using the most appropriate commercially available PPE including level 1, 2, 3 surgical masks, face shields, gloves, and gowns. When N95 masks are again available to dentists commercially, they may be used as an option when high aerosolization is anticipated.
- Dispose of gloves after each patient.
- Use disposable gowns or gowns constructed of materials which would allow them to be laundered and sanitized onsite or by commercial laundry.
- Dispose or sterilize all instruments in an autoclave and individually wrapped for each patient.
- Clean and sanitize dental chairs and face shields after each patient.
- Do NOT come to work if sick, have a fever, or show symptoms of COVID-19.

V. COMMUNICATION TO STAFF

- Dentists should meet with all staff and present COVID-19 guidelines and instructions and provide frequent updates.

- Remind staff that they – and all healthcare providers – are required to adhere to guidelines established by the CDC, OSHA, the Hawaii State Department of Health, and the Hawaii State Board of Dentistry.

VI. COMMUNICATION TO PATIENTS

- It will be some time before the public can resume life without masks, without social distancing guidelines and restrictions, and without governmental mandates. Preparing to Return to Work also means supporting patients to feel comfortable in returning for dental visits.
- Therefore, *transparently* practicing higher standards of health and safety guidelines will help your patients and staff prioritize their oral health care needs and allay their health and safety concerns.

VII. RESOURCES

[ADA Coronavirus for Dentists, www.ada.org/virus](http://www.ada.org/virus)

[CDC Coronavirus, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html)

[OSHA, https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/)

[Hawaii State Department of Health, https://hawaiicovid19.com/](https://hawaiicovid19.com/)

[Office of the Governor of Hawaii, https://governor.hawaii.gov/](https://governor.hawaii.gov/)

Mahalo!

The HDA will continue to update these recommendations as evidence-based information becomes available. We appreciate your patience as we navigate the unknown together. Thank you for your dedication to our profession and the Hawaii community!

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - PATIENT DISCLOSURES

This patient disclosure form seeks information from you that we must consider before making treatment decisions in the circumstance of the COVID-19 virus.

A weak or compromised immune system (including, but not limited to, conditions like diabetes, asthma, COPD, cancer treatment, radiation, chemotherapy, and any prior or current disease or medical condition), can put you at greater risk for contracting COVID-19. Please disclose to us any condition that compromises your immune system and understand that we may ask you to consider rescheduling treatment after discussing any such conditions with us.

It is also important that you disclose to this office any indication of having been exposed to COVID-19, or whether you have experienced any signs or symptoms associated with the COVID-19 virus.

	Yes	No
Do you have a fever or above normal temperature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you experiencing shortness of breath or having trouble breathing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a dry cough?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a runny nose?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you recently lost or had a reduction in your sense of smell?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a sore throat?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Even if you don't <i>currently</i> have any of the above symptoms, have you experienced any of these symptoms in the last 14 days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you tested positive for COVID-19?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you traveled outside the United States by air or cruise ship in the past 14 days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you traveled within the United States by air, bus or train within the past 14 days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I fully understand and acknowledge the above information, risks and cautions regarding a compromised immune system and have disclosed to my provider any conditions in my health history which may result in a compromised immune system.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that the answers I have provided above are true and accurate.

Signature

Date

Witness