

Dental Appointments and COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions

Use these sample responses to help answer common questions you and your office staff may receive from patients by phone, email or social media.

Can I put off my dental appointment until after the COVID-19 pandemic is over?

 Regular dental appointments are an important part of taking care of your overall health. While it can be tempting to put off your regular checkup until things feel more “normal” again, I advise against it. Routine appointments give me an opportunity to check for a number of health conditions and catch them early. Some conditions, like tooth decay, can be more difficult, painful and expensive to treat if they’re left undetected.

Your health and safety is, and has always been, my top priority. My staff and I are taking every precaution to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission at your visit.

What about teledentistry? Can I substitute a virtual visit for my regular appointment?

 A phone or video appointment isn’t the same as your regular appointment. Teledentistry can be helpful in some situations, such as deciding if an oral health issue you’re experiencing is an emergency that requires immediate treatment or if it’s something that can wait a bit. If you think you may be experiencing a dental emergency, call my office and we’ll help you decide if you need to come in.

What are you doing differently because of COVID-19?

 There are a number of science-backed steps my staff and I are taking to help limit the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- **Increased personal protective equipment** including masks, face shields, goggles and surgical gowns or long-sleeved lab coats.
- **Increased cleaning protocols.** This includes using disinfectants known to kill the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, removing high-touch items like magazines and toys from waiting rooms and frequently cleaning items like pens and clipboards.
- **Asking you to change your behavior** by asking you to wait outside rather than in waiting rooms when possible, wearing face masks and not bringing additional people to your appointment.

[Points to consider adding in relation to your office:]

- Detailed instructions on how patients should check in and where they should wait until you are ready for them.
- Information on what happens if the patient forgets or does not wear a mask. Will your office provide one?
- If a parent is calling to book an appointment for their child, consider offering the following information:

Patient Return: What to Expect After COVID-19

- Where to wait, especially if they are bringing in more than one child for back-to-back appointments
 - Whether the parent will be allowed in the treatment room with the child
 - Offer advice to parents on how to describe the new PPE you and your team will be wearing in an age appropriate way to their child(ren)
- Customize the visual guide of what to expect at your next appointment with your practice information. Mail or email the file to your patients prior to your visit as a follow up to this conversation.

I've heard it's safer to schedule your appointment for first thing in the morning — the office will be cleaner because there haven't been patients coming through before me. Is that true?

A You should schedule your dental appointment for the time of day that works for you. The same enhanced cleaning protocols occur all day long, including leaving the room empty after a patient leaves to allow the appropriate time necessary as part of thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting the space between patients.

How is your dental team monitoring themselves for COVID-19?

A Staff at our practice are subject to daily health screenings. This includes taking their temperatures to make sure they don't have a fever and asking them a series of health-related questions each day to make sure they're not experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.

I see you added a charge related to COVID-19 to my bill. What's that for?

A The safety of patients and dental staff is my highest priority. Because of the shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE), the cost of (PPE) has increased considerably. Our office is including this charge during the pandemic until supply can meet demand and costs are controlled. If you have a dental benefit plan, it may cover some or all of these charges and the ADA has been advocating for payment from insurance companies across the country. However, the outcome is up to each plan.

You said you cannot see me as a patient because of my COVID-19 risk. Can you do that?

A Yes. The safety of our patients and the dental team is our highest priority. As Dentists, we use our professional judgment and guidance from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ADA to determine risk levels for seeing patients. If it was determined that you were high risk, or had a high temperature on the day of your appointment, we can have a conversation about which factors determined delay of service, so that you can self-monitor and reschedule.