

Friday, April 17, 2020

ISSUES ALERT: COVID-19 Testing in Dental Practices: What We Know and What We're Doing

Dear Colleagues,

“When will we be able to go back to work?”

After weeks of closures and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is one question on the minds of dentists who are eager to re-open their practices and serve their communities.

To be clear, the ADA's current interim recommendation urges all dentists to remain closed to all except urgent and emergency dental care until April 30th, though state and local mandates take precedence.

Since we first issued the recommendation, we have learned so much about how to allow dentists to safely return to practice. The ADA's Board of Trustees will soon consider a draft recommendation regarding what dentists are advised to do after April 30th, and an update will be issued before that date.

Yet, understandably, dentists are looking ahead to a post-pandemic future. Thoughts of this future bring forth another question: “Will we be able administer point-of-care COVID-19 tests in our offices?”

Because COVID-19 is caused by a novel coronavirus—one that, by many estimates, is only months old—the science on its testing is emerging.

However, as some individuals infected with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, it's increasingly clear that dentists should be able to use fast and accurate COVID-19 tests as one way to minimize the risk of disease transmission when caring for patients in the foreseeable future.

Although the ADA does not have an official policy or position on this matter, I'd like to share what we currently know about the state of point-of-care COVID-19 testing, what we're doing on behalf of the dental community, and what dentists should be aware of.

What We Know

As of April 16th, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved 39 companies to fast-track testing products that would either detect the presence of antibodies to COVID-19 (signaling an individual's previous exposure to the virus and potential immunity) or antigens that signal active COVID-19 infection. These tests have been issued [Emergency Use Authorizations](#), making them available in medical settings “to diagnose and respond to public health emergencies.”

We have learned that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has purchased and distributed tests to some community health centers (CHCs). It's possible that dentists may be administering the tests on behalf of medical staff in CHCs.

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What the ADA is Doing Now

Our Association is taking incisive action on this issue. The [ADA has asked the HHS to issue federal guidance](#) that enables dentists to administer FDA-authorized point-of-care COVID-19 tests in their offices.

From the perspective of ADA staff experts, the use of COVID-19 tests in a dental setting is not a scope-of-practice issue, given that dentists routinely assess patients' smoking habits and screen blood pressure as well as blood sugar and A1C levels in some cases.

In a dental setting, the test is not diagnostic as dentists are not treating COVID-19 but instead using it as a predictable means to protect their patients, staff, and themselves during dental treatment.

Additionally, the ADA Science Division is reviewing the existing evidence on point-of-care COVID-19 tests, and the ADA is in direct contact with test manufacturers and distributors.

We are hopeful that federal action and evidence-based insights (along with forthcoming guidance from the [newly formed ADA Task Force on Dental Practice Recovery](#)) will inform our profession's next steps as dental offices seek to re-open.

What Dentists Should Know

With scientific evidence continually emerging on COVID-19, [there are many gray market products](#) (including testing kits, dental supplies, and personal protective equipment) being marketed to dentists during this crucial time.

There is no evidence of these products' effectiveness, but they may be advertised to you based on your online search history.

Dentists beware: Ensure that you are purchasing products from reputable suppliers. Chances are that if a product seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Just as we are working to support you now, the ADA also has its eye on a future where all things work together for the good of our profession and for the health and safety of our communities.

The situation is rapidly evolving, but we will continue to advocate on your behalf. There is a long road ahead—the American Dental Association is with you all the way.

More to come.

Chad P. Gehani, DDS
President