

OPERATIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES AND COVID-19

DHCP (dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, and receptionists) need to update their knowledge and skills regarding infection control and follow the protocols recommended by the relevant authorities to protect themselves and their patients against infections.

An attempt should be made to telephone triage all patients in need of dental care. Teledentistry can be of great assistance in the current pandemic situation. The entire process of networking, sharing digital information, distant consultations, workup, and analysis is dealt with by a segment of the science of telemedicine concerned with dentistry known as “Teledentistry”. Based on the patients’ signs and symptoms, a decision should be made to determine whether the patient needs to be seen in the dental clinic. Appropriate pharmaceuticals and detailed home care instructions should be provided by means of Teledentistry in situations where dental treatment can be delayed.

After a decision has been made that the patient needs to visit the dental clinic, the next step should be to evaluate the patients for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection to determine in which clinical setting they should be seen. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, patients with active COVID-19 infection should not be seen in dental settings and should be referred for emergency care where appropriate transmission-based precautions are available.

A detailed history should be obtained from the patients by requesting them to fill the screening form for COVID-19 infection which should include the following questions: (1) Do you have fever or have experienced fever within the past 14 days? (2) Have you experienced a recent onset of respiratory problems, such as a cough or difficulty in breathing within the past 14 days? (3) Have you, within the past 14 days, travelled to countries with documented (SARS)-CoV-2 transmission? Or have you come into contact with people who have travelled to these countries? (4) Have you come into contact with a patient with confirmed (SARS)-CoV-2 infection within the past 14 days? (5) Are there people with documented experience of fever or respiratory problems within the last 14 days having close contact with you? (7) Have you recently participated in any gathering, meetings, or had close contact with many unacquainted people?.

Upon patient’s arrival, the body temperature of the patient should be measured using a contact-free forehead thermometer. If the patient answers “no” to all the questions and if the patient is afebrile, the patient can be treated by the dental surgeon following the recommended protocols. The ability to test patients who need dental care for SARS-CoV-2 is to be considered in order to restart dentistry in a sustainable way. Tests can be a strong tool to mitigate risks for patients and oral healthcare workers too.

Dr. Rohit Rai
Associate Editor