Coronavirus Disease 2019 (abbreviated “COVID-19”) is a novel (new) respiratory disease caused by the virus named “SARS-CoV-2”. WHO officially characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic in March 2020 because of the global spread and severity of illnesses. COVID-19 causes mild to severe symptoms. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. The immediate risk of being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 is still low for most Americans, but as the outbreak expands, the risk will increase. The risk of exposure is higher for these people: travelers returning from affected international locations; people in places where ongoing community spread is occurring; healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19; and close contacts of persons with COVID-19. There is still much that is unknown about the virus causing COVID-19. Based on the information we have so far, the infection appears to spread from person to person by respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. Respiratory droplets might land on objects and surfaces around the infected person. Other people can catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

CDC offers interim guidance for healthcare facilities and healthcare professionals. The American Dental Association COVID-19 site additionally provides recommendations for Dental Health Care Professionals (DHCP). These recommendations are based on what we know about COVID-19 and are subject to change as we learn more.

Be prepared:

- Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Monitor the CDC COVID-19 website, the Virginia Department of Health website, and your local health department website for the latest, and most reliable information.
- Develop, or review, your facility’s emergency plan. Prepare for possible staff absenteeism caused by employee illness or illness in the employees’ family members that would require them to stay home. Planning for absenteeism could include extending hours, cross-training current employees, or hiring temporary employees.
- Create an emergency contact list. Know how to reach your local and state health department in an emergency. For COVID-19 related calls, contact 877-ASK-VDH3.
- Contact your local health department immediately if you suspect a patient has COVID-19.

Communicate with staff and patients:

- Communicate about COVID-19 with your staff.
  - Share information about COVID-19, especially information that specifically addresses COVID-19 prevention and precautions in the dental setting.
  - Share your facility’s emergency preparedness plan with your staff to ensure they understand their role and responsibilities.
Ensure staff are aware of sick leave policies and are encouraged to stay home if they are ill with respiratory symptoms.

Communicate about COVID-19 with your patients.
- Consider using your facility’s social media pages or listserve to share updates.
- Consider removing penalty policies regarding appointment cancellations related to respiratory illness.
- Request that patients with recent travel to areas with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 consider rescheduling routine appointments past 14 days of their return.
- Encourage patients to reschedule non-emergency appointments if they are feeling ill, or are in close contact with someone who is ill, to a later date and time.
- When scheduling appointments for routine dental care, instruct patients to call ahead and discuss the need to reschedule their appointment if they develop symptoms of respiratory infection on the day they are scheduled to be seen.

Prepare your facility:
- Remain alert to recognize patients with acute respiratory illness identified at check-in.
  - Screen patients for international travel, signs or symptoms of infection, or contact with another ill person within the last 14 days when you update their medical histories.
  - Initiate temperature checks prior to performing dental procedures. If a patient presents with a temperature ($\geq 100.4^\circ F$), see Respond section below.
  - Have patients rinse with 1% hydrogen peroxide or Chlorhexidine (Peridex) before each appointment.
- Provide alcohol-based hand rub with 60-95% alcohol, tissues, and no-touch receptacles for disposal at your facility entrance, waiting room, and patient check-in.
- Routine cleaning and disinfection practices are encouraged, especially in “high-touch” areas (e.g., chairs, door handles).
  - CDC posted environmental cleaning and disinfection guidance for healthcare settings. Refer to List N on the EPA website for EPA-registered disinfectants that have qualified for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.
- Consider removing items that are not easily disinfected from waiting areas such as toys, magazines, and reading materials.
- Increase visible signage at entrances and waiting areas to encourage hand and respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette. VDH signage is available under the ‘Print Resources/Infographics’ Tab.
- Ensure the personal protective equipment (PPE) are available and equipment is appropriate for the procedure.
  - Use high-speed evacuation for all dental procedures producing an aerosol.
  - Use a rubber dam whenever possible to decrease potential exposures.
  - Autoclave your handpiece after each patient.
  - Ensure your facility has an adequate supply of PPE to accomplish routine procedures safely. Report supply disruptions to your local health department and notify the FDA device shortages mailbox, deviceshortages@fda.hhs.gov.
o **CDC Guidance** still recommends DHCP wear single-use disposable facemasks once and discard. Eye protection with solid side shields or face shields will help protect DHCP from splashes. Change masks between patients or during patient treatment if the mask becomes wet.

**Respond:**

- If a patient presents with fever or symptoms of a respiratory infection:
  - Place the person in a single-patient room with a closed door, if available.
  - Offer a disposable surgical mask to the patient and provide tissues and no-touch receptacles for used tissue disposal.
  - DHCP assessing patient with flu-like or other respiratory illness should wear disposable surgical facemask, non-sterile gloves, gown, and eye protection (e.g., goggles) to prevent exposure.
  - Encourage staff and patients to prevent transmission of respiratory infections by adhering to hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
  - Contact your [local health department](#) immediately if you suspect a patient has COVID-19 (e.g., if person had close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19 within 14 days of illness onset) for further guidance.

- Dental health care personnel should postpone non-emergency or elective dental procedures until that person is determined to be no longer infectious.

- If urgent dental treatment is necessary, DHCP and medical providers should coordinate to determine appropriate precautions and location of procedure on a case-by-case basis to prevent spread of disease among patients, visitors, and staff.

**References:**

VDH COVID-19

CDC Guidance for Healthcare Facilities

CDC Guidance for Healthcare Professionals

American Dental Association COVID-19, (Additionally, [an FAQ](#) posted March 11, 2020)