



COLLEGE OF DENTAL HYGIENISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Further to our communique of March 17, 2020 the College has received a number of queries regarding whether or not dental hygienists have an obligation to suspend services and/or close their practices at this time.

Today, Dr. Henry has stated 'social distancing is not optional'. As such, when determining the ability to provide care, registrants must consider whether social distancing can be achieved. Given the nature of dental hygiene care, it is clear that social distancing cannot be achieved.

Dr. Henry also stated that 'dentists should only be providing emergency services during this period.' We feel this statement also extends to dental hygienists. Therefore, when thinking about the scope of practice for dental hygiene, including the provision of restricted activities, there is very little dental hygiene care that could be classified as 'emergency services'.

Therefore, the College is making the strong recommendation that all direct dental hygiene care be suspended until further notice. The provision of dental hygiene care is only acceptable in emergency situations, and this would be the very rarest of circumstances.

This being said, the care of a client also involves the management of their needs, which may be able to be addressed through other means rather than direct client care. A remote assessment of the client's concerns and dental status may be completed and where appropriate, a referral or consultation with another health professional may be warranted as an alternative to direct client care.

For dental hygienists practicing in a dental office, the determination to provide care will be made in conjunction with other team members to ensure the health and safety of all.

We encourage our private dental hygiene practices to be available to their clients and to manage their clients' needs appropriately. Should an emergency situation arise, we recommend fully assessing the client's needs and exploring other available options to address those needs before making the determination to provide in-person care. Should a dental hygienist need to provide emergency care, they must adhere to client pre-screening and stringent infection prevention and control protocols with personal protective equipment being donned and doffed appropriately. Aerosol-producing procedures should be avoided. Social distancing protocols among clients and dental personnel in common areas prior to and following the provision of care must be in place.

During this dynamic time dental hygienists may be called upon to offer support or assistance to other members of the dental team as needed for emergency care. The College of Dental Surgeons of BC has created an FAQ with further details around the provision of dental care during this pandemic. That document can be accessed [here](#).

I would like to take the opportunity to further clarify the required self-isolation period for PDC attendees scheduled to end March 22. It is critical that registrants understand that while your self-isolation may be complete, it does not mean that you should automatically go back to work on March 23rd. Even though your self-isolation period has ended, you should only return to work as long as you are symptom-free and are needed to provide emergency care as outlined above.

These are very challenging times for all Canadians, and we must all recognize our obligations not only as professionals but to our duty as citizens. Evidence tell us that there is no cure for COVID-19 and the only way to slow it down is to follow the mandates of social distancing and/or isolation. This is a shared responsibility which none of us should take lightly. As explained previously, the College does not have the statutory authority to suspend the provision of care, however; CDHBC expects registrants to conduct themselves ethically and safely and to recognize their professional obligation to make prudent decisions given the current environment.

Again, let me re-iterate that if you have any questions related to any employment matter, including eligibility for Employment Insurance or other financial assistance, please direct them to the BC Dental Hygienists Association.

On a personal note, I want to thank all registrants for their ongoing professionalism during this time. It is clear that you are engaged with us in our mandate to protect the public.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Lawrence".

Jennifer Lawrence
Registrar/CEO
College of Dental Hygienists of BC