



Infection control in dental

Infection control

In recent years the community has become more aware of infectious diseases and the ability of these diseases to spread from one person to another.

The practices that prevent the spread of infectious disease is called infection control. These precautions have greatly reduced the chances of infection occurring from patient to healthcare worker, from healthcare worker to patient and from patient to patient.

The principles of infection control for dental environments are the same as for hospitals. High standards of infection control are required for all dental treatments.

Principles of infection control

You may hear your dental professional talk about standard precautions. These precautions consist of guidelines about safe work practices for infection control.

The four key principles of infection control in the dental surgery are:

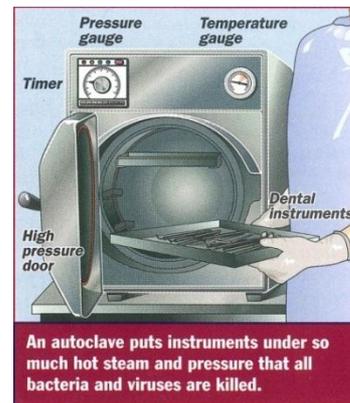
- Sterilising all re-usable instruments
- Disposing of all single-use materials and instruments
- 'Barrier' methods
- Manual techniques

Sterilising and autoclaves

All dental instruments must be sterilised so that all bacteria and viruses are eliminated. After a drill, handpiece, mirror or other dental instrument is used it is thoroughly cleaned, rinsed and sterilised in an Autoclave.

The Autoclave puts instruments under so much hot steam and pressure that all bacteria and viruses are killed.

Instruments are put into packs and then Autoclaved. The procedures for cleaning and sterilising instruments are rigorous and must be strictly followed. To protect special instruments against damage from steam sterilising, some dentists prefer sterilisers that use dry heat instead of steam.



Single-use materials and instruments

Some instruments and materials are only used once. As they are sterile to begin with and have never been used with anyone but you—there is no risk that they could transmit an infection.

Using safe methods of disposal, your dental professional will discard the instrument or material securely when finished with it. Some single-use materials come pre-packaged and are protected from contamination.

Manual techniques

In dental clinics, dental professionals use a range of methods that reduce the risk of spread of infection.





Instruments and materials are always placed on a specially cleaned tray that is prepared for each patient.

Before each patient is treated, the dental chair and other surfaces are wiped clean.

A high-speed suction device is used to remove both water and aerosol (mist) from inside the patient's mouth. This lowers the amount of aerosol in the air that may be inhaled by the dental professionals or patient.

Prior to some treatments, the dental professional may give you a mouth rinse. This aims to reduce the number of bacteria and viruses that are often in the mouth.

Barrier methods

Barrier methods use impermeable materials such as plastic and rubber to reduce the chance of bacteria or viruses coming in contact with a patient or dental professionals.

Dental professionals may use gloves, a face mask, a gown and eye glasses or face shield. Patients will also be given eye glasses to wear. All of these devices form a physical barrier that is difficult for bacteria to cross.

Talking with your dental professional about infection control

Your dental health is important. If you have any concerns about infectious disease or infection control, ask your dental professional. They will be happy to answer questions and all discussions are confidential.

Infection control is more than a set of guidelines for dental staff. It also involves patients having a greater understanding of their care, treatment, rights and responsibilities.

Providing your medical history to your dental professional

Your dental professional will ask you about any problems you may have had with your health and your teeth. A previous health complaint can affect your treatment and medication, it is important that you provide details about your dental and medical history. This will help the dental professional to determine which treatment is best for you.

When giving your history, please inform the dental professional of any infectious diseases that you may have. This may affect the type of treatment you receive.

Delay of dental treatment

Under some conditions, your dental professional may advise you that dental treatment should be delayed.

Some may be:

- Serious depression of the immune system
- Treatment for cancer
- Active Tuberculosis
- An open cold sore (herpes) on the lip

When treatment is urgent, dental care may be provided with some extra precautions such as antibiotics.

