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*"Dentistry at work"*

# INFECTION CONTROL IN THE DENTAL OFFICE

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# Infection control in the Dental Office

Infection control in the dental healthcare environment is extremely important, especially as this prevents the spreading of infections. There are principles that are considered to be standard precautionary measures in infection control.

## Standard pre-cautionary measures are:

- Performing hand hygiene – healthcare providers are expected to correctly wash their hands before treating patients, during procedures and after treatment. Patients are also encouraged to wash their hands as they enter the treatment rooms to prevent contaminating surfaces.

- The use of personal protective equipment (PPE)– this includes the wearing of masks, gloves, goggles and aprons by the treating practitioner to prevent the passing of micro-organisms from patient to practitioner and from practitioner to patient. Practitioners are normally trained on the effective use of PPE, and how to prevent the further spread of contamination while wearing PPE by:

1. Keep hands away from the face.
2. Limit touching surfaces.
3. Not walking out of the treatment rooms wearing PPE.
4. Correctly performing hand hygiene.



- Following respiratory hygiene or cough etiquette principles – it is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) that individuals cough into the inner arm and not into a fist. It is also good etiquette to cough into a paper towel and correctly dispose it after use.
- Management of patient care equipment through sterilisation and disinfecting surfaces – all equipment used to treat patients must be sterilised and safely stored.
- Following the correct procedures for the safe handling of needles and sharps – Needles are not handed over from one person to another, it is best to place them on a flat surface and they are taken from there. Contaminated needles are disposed of in a sharps container and not in a plastic or regular bin. Mishandling sharps and needles can lead to “needle prick injury”.



### Management of a needle prick injury.

This is a medical emergency where a contaminated needle pricks a health care practitioner. There is no guarantee that the patient has no transmissible diseases and therefore the health care worker will have to take post exposure prophylactic medication for a month. It is also possible for a contaminated needle to prick a patient. The patient should be educated on needle prick injury protocol and be given post exposure prophylactic medication.

### Infection control in dentistry.

One of the biggest challenges in dentistry is the control of airborne infections. These are infections that do not need physical contact for transmission and are transmissible through coughing or body liquid droplets. Infection control management for patients with these conditions, or patients suspected to have these conditions includes source control. This is ensuring that the patient wears a mask while they are in the dental office. It is easier to control the source of the pathogen than other patients who might be recipients.



Infection control does not only protect the patient but is intended for both the patients and the health care providers. There are healthcare personnel who are more susceptible to infections due to age or having compromised immune systems. This highlights the importance of patients disclosing all their medical conditions as a way to protect health care practitioners.



All dental offices must have infection control policies that are reviewed at least annually as a way to protect patients and dental practitioners. Each dental practice should have an in-house infection control coordinator to ensure that all material and equipment needed for infection control is available and all infection control standards are adhered to.