COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies for Healthcare Providers

The following guidance was written by Dr. Guy Deyton, State Dental Director, and reviewed by Dr. George Turabelidze, State Epidemiologist.

HEALTHCARE FACILITIES ARE HELD TO A HIGHER STANDARD

Hospitals, medical and dental facilities are held to higher standards than retail businesses.

- Regardless of community debates about masking or vaccination, healthcare facilities are held to a higher standard for disease control and asepsis than retail businesses.
- Do not be misled by community standards for retail businesses! If you only comply with standards for retail businesses, you may be practicing below the standard of care.
- Standards for Missouri hospitals, medical and dental facilities are determined by recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS), regulatory boards and local/county health departments.

THE COVID-19 DELTA VARIANT IS MORE CONTAGIOUS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCREENING, STAFF/PATIENT PROTECTION & TESTING

The Delta Variant is 60-100% more contagious than previous variants and currently represents more than 90% of COVID-19 infections in Missouri. The Delta Variant is adversely affecting younger, healthier patients, including young children.

Screening

- Screening for potentially contagious patients has changed!
- Delta may present with milder upper respiratory symptoms in early stages, especially in previously vaccinated patients.
- Be suspicious of any upper respiratory issue like 'summer cold' or 'seasonal allergy'.
- There is a 10-20% rate of breakthrough infections in vaccinated patients. Even mildly symptomatic vaccinated patients may be contagious.
- *Screen for common symptoms:* cough, fever, muscle pain, upper respiratory symptoms, headache AND *screen for oral lesions:* Recent research indicates up to 80% of COVID-19 patients exhibit oral lesions in the first two weeks after contracting COVID-19.
- Two positive responses to screening questions indicates need for testing.

Staff Protection

- Healthcare facilities should avoid unprotected congregation in waiting areas or staff break rooms.
- Clinical staff should protect themselves with N95 masks. DHSS will provide N95 masks if healthcare providers experience shortages. *See sidebar for information.*
- The primary route of COVID-19 contagion is through respiratory droplets. Masks protect the respiratory tree when breathing.
- Fastidious, regular 20-second hand hygiene washes before and after every patient contact protect contamination of oral, nasal and ocular surfaces via inadvertent hand contact.
- The best ways to prevent office closures is to use **N95 masks**, enforce **hand washing**, and **screen patients and staff**.

On-Site Testing

To mitigate the contagiousness of Delta variant and avoid long-quarantine facility shutdowns, on-site quick testing for symptomatic patients and prophylactic serial (regular, repetitive) testing of staff is now recommended.

- DHSS has online training available for providers who wish to perform quick or serial testing.
- A Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) must be incorporated into your practice to test on-site. The ADA *COVID-19 & Lab Testing Requirements Toolkit* provides additional information on the CLIA, and the DHSS training will further explain the requirement.
- DHSS can provide COVID-19 quick tests to healthcare providers and educate in use and reporting. *See sidebar for information.*

LAST UPDATED 8/26/21

POSITIVE TEST RESULTS

What should the dentist or staff member do if they have come in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19?

Dentist/Staff Fully Vaccinated (*Two weeks after 2 doses of Pfizer/Moderna or 1 dose of Johnson & Johnson/Janssen*)

Vaccination does not prevent you from getting COVID-19. Vaccinations dramatically reduce your risk of having a serious case of COVID-19 requiring hospitalization. Breakthrough COVID-19 infections occur in about 10-20% of patients previously vaccinated. Even asymptomatic, previously vaccinated people may carry enough virus to be contagious.

- Mask in all situations and social distance to protect others until tests and symptoms prove you to be negative. Vaccinated healthcare workers can continue patient care while awaiting test results.
- Monitor your symptoms. Screen for common symptoms: cough, fever, muscle pain, upper respiratory symptoms, headache AND screen for oral lesions.

Dentist/Staff NOT Fully Vaccinated

- Isolate and quarantine immediately.
- Monitor your symptoms. Screen for common symptoms: cough, fever, muscle pain, upper respiratory symptoms, headache AND screen for oral lesions.

For Both—When To Test

- Due to the increased contagiousness of the Delta variant and the increased possibility of asymptomatic cases of breakthrough infections in vaccinated people, testing of face-forward healthcare workers is recommended between the third and fifth day after exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 positive patient.
- Tests prior to the third day are inconclusive and may give a false sense of security.
- If tests are negative and you have no symptoms, you may return to the CDC guidelines for healthcare facilities, including serial prophylactic testing of staff.
- If tests are positive or you develop symptoms, follow the protocols below.

Positive Test and/or Developing Symptoms

- If you develop symptoms, get tested for COVID-19.
- *Identify close contacts:* Defined by the CDC as proximity (within 6 feet) to someone confirmed positive for COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes in a 24-hour period starting from two days before illness onset or two days prior to testing. (*Note: School setting close contacts are different.*)
- *Notify Your County Health Department:* to assist you in evaluating your status and to conduct contact tracing to help protect your friends and colleagues.

Quarantine & Isolation Duration

Quarantine separates people who have close contact to a disease to determine if they will become sick. Vaccinated people have less stringent quarantine requirements than unvaccinated.

- People fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine while waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- People not fully vaccinated need to quarantine while awaiting test results.

Isolation separates people who test positive to prevent disease spread to others. All people must isolate after receiving a positive COVID-19 test result.

- People who test positive with NO symptoms: Isolate 10 days from date of the positive test.
- People not fully vaccinated with positive test and symptoms: Isolate for minimum 10 days after symptoms first appear and 24 hours after symptoms stopped, whichever is longer.
- People fully vaccinated with positive test and symptoms: Isolate 10 days from symptom onset.