

For Immediate Release

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What Patients Can Expect As They Return To Dental Offices

Jefferson City, Mo. – On May 4, Missourians began having their teeth checked and cleaned at the dentist again for the first time in almost two months. Medical providers, including dentists, may now provide usual services at their discretion as part of Governor Mike Parson’s Show Me Strong Recovery Plan.

Missouri dentists were never mandated to close their practices. Instead, the American Dental Association (ADA) recommended all dentists postpone non-urgent dental procedures through April 30 to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

“Our members were committed to doing what they had to as a profession to assist in the mitigation of COVID-19 and to adhere to recommendations from the ADA, CDC, and state and local orders,” said Vicki Wilbers, Missouri Dental Association (MDA) Executive Director. “Certainly, the shut down on elective procedures for seven weeks was difficult when many treatments are considered elective—cleanings, gum disease treatment, crowns, fillings—but being able to provide these now helps ensure treatment doesn’t become urgent or emergent, resulting in more costly and less favorable outcomes.”

When patients across the state begin to receive care from their dentists, they will notice a new experience intended to reduce the potential risk of exposure to COVID-19.

“We knew there were going to be a lot of new processes in our office,” said Dr. Mike Berry, owner of Moberly Family Dentistry.

As the president of the MDA, Berry has integrated recommendations and resources from the ADA Return to Work Interim Guidance Toolkit and from the Missouri Dental Practice Recovery Task Force Guidelines, in which he participated.

“We are asking a lot of screening questions prior to the visit, and again when they arrive for their appointment—about potential exposure to COVID as well as travel, and how they feel in general,” Berry explained. “We perform a health history update with every visit anyway, but now it’s been ramped up to ask more specific COVID-related questions. We’re also taking temperatures, escorting them direct from their car to the chair and other precautions.”

According to an FAQ on the ADA’s MouthHealthy.org, the following are some things you may expect when visiting the dentist for the first time since COVID:

- To help make sure that patients arriving for their appointments are healthy, your dental office may call you before your appointment and ask you some questions about your

current health—and they may repeat these questions when you arrive to make sure nothing has changed. Some offices may conduct a teledentistry consult, through which a video-based exchange between the patient and the office team helps determine next steps.

- Your dentist's office staff may ask that you limit the number of people you bring to the appointment, and when you arrive at the dental office, you may be asked to wait outside until they're ready for you.
- When you enter the office, you may have your temperature taken.
- Inside the office, you may notice things people often touch in the waiting room—like toys or magazines—have been removed.
- When you're in the dental chair, you may notice some things look different from the last time you were there. The computer keyboard may have a disposable cover so it can be easily cleaned between patients, for example. Disinfecting will be ramped up through the entire office.
- Your dentist also may be using different protective equipment than they've used at previous appointments. This could include different masks, face shields, gowns and goggles. These additional precautions help protect both you and the dentist.

"The biggest tangible difference is our team—the hygienists, assistants and the doctor—will be wearing more personal protective equipment, including face shields," Berry said.

Many doctors say their practice plans are to cut back on the number of patients coming to the office each day, to re-open slowly as everyone—dental team members and patients—get acclimated to new procedures, and to allow time for these additional safety processes to occur.

"We want people to remember that regular dental visits are an essential part of their oral hygiene routine—we want to see them back—but we also want them to know that patient safety is our utmost concern, as well as that of our team members. We're taking all the steps to ensure it's safe to come back to the dentist" Berry said.

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The MDA is a non-profit, professional organization with more than 2,000 members statewide, representing all areas of dentistry. Founded in 1865, the MDA is a unified organization of individual members committed to the highest quality of care for the public and a resource for advocacy, education, communication, information and fellowship. Learn more at [modental.org](https://www.modental.org).