

20 March 2020

Dear Registrant

The current COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact across all health services. Dentists' primary obligation now is to ensure their own health, the health and wellbeing of their staff and to protect their patients.

Ireland's national response to COVID-19 is supported by a dedicated governance structure to ensure a public health-led, whole-of-society approach. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) for COVID-19, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, oversees and provides direction, guidance, support and expert advice on the development and implementation of a strategy to respond to COVID-19 in Ireland. The NPHE is supported by an Expert Advisory Group and a number of subgroups. The Taoiseach in his national address on St Patrick's Day emphasised that at all times the Government will be guided by, and take, the expert advice of the NPHE.

The Expert Advisory Group to NPHE and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) have assessed the particular risks for the dental profession and their patients. Their advice is that there is no current scientific evidence that requires suspension of dental care to members of the public who have neither a fever nor respiratory symptoms **eg. cough, shortness of breath**. Neither is there scientific evidence to support the use of respirator masks for routine dental practice. This is consistent with the advice given to other healthcare professionals who perform aerosol generating procedures on patients without fever or symptoms of respiratory tract infection.

To be clear, at this time, the advice is that with appropriate precautions to manage the risk of exposure to patients with fever or respiratory symptoms and with a high standard of infection prevention and control practice, dental practices can remain open. There is currently no need to advise against any specific dental interventions. The exceptions are if a patient reports a fever or symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) or if you have COVID-19 related concerns about a patient, such as their recent travel history. In such cases essential dental care should be considered only after consultation with the patient's GP and/or assigned physician and/or as advised by a public health official. No dental professional is expected to take such a decision without the support of medical colleagues.

The document "**Interim guidance for healthcare professionals in relation to the management of individuals with suspected COVID-19 infection presenting to community health care settings other than general practice**" was developed by the HPSC. The document is relevant to dental practice. The HPSC has confirmed that this guidance dated 10th March 2020 remains valid until further notice.

See weblink

www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance.

Responses to key dental queries are attached and must be read in conjunction with this letter. I wish to assure you that if there are any changes to the above advice, you will be informed.

Yours faithfully,

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