



HOW TO KNOW IF YOU ARE PROTECTED FROM INFECTIOUS DISEASE TRANSMISSION DURING DENTAL TREATMENT

A Patient's Perspective
By Mary Govoni CDA, RDH, MBA

First, observe the office environment:

- Is there a sign in the reception area asking if you have a cough or a fever?
- Is the office clean, neat and uncluttered?
- Is the area in the office where the dental instruments are cleaned and sterilized visible? If so, is it clean, neat and uncluttered?

Second, observe the dentist, hygienist and dental assistant:

- Do you see the dentist, hygienist and assistant wearing gloves and a face mask while they are treating you?
- Does the dentist, hygienist or assistant wash their hands or use a hand sanitizer prior to treating you? (before they put on their gloves)
- Does the dentist, hygienist or assistant wash their hands or use a hand sanitizer after they remove their gloves?

Third, ask questions about infection prevention and how you are being protected:

- Ask the dentist, hygienist or assistant how the instruments are sterilized. Will they show you the sterilization area?
- Ask how they clean and disinfect the operator and how often. (It should be cleaned after every patient)
- Ask to see the instruments/instrument cassettes in their sterile packaging prior to your procedure.
- Ask if the dental hand pieces (drills) are sterilized after each use.
- Ask what the practice does with reusable items that can't be heat sterilized. (These items should be chemically sterilized.)
- Ask whether the practice monitors the effectiveness of their sterilizer every day with a spore test or biological indicator.
- Ask whether the practice ever reuses disposable items.
- Ask how the practice maintains the water quality in the dental units.
- Ask whether the doctor, hygienist and assistant have been vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Ask how often the entire team participates in infection control training updates.

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Mary Govoni brings over 40 years of experience in dentistry. She is a Certified Dental Assistant, a Registered Dental Assistant (MI) and a Registered Dental Hygienist, with experience in general and specialty practices both clinically and as an administrator. Mary is a former dental assisting educator and was a partner in a successful dental staffing service.

For the past 20 years, Mary has focused on speaking and consulting with dental teams on infection prevention, OSHA compliance, ergonomics, chairside efficiency and team communication and development. Mary has published numerous articles in professional journals. She is a life member and Past President of the American Dental Assistants Association, and serves on the ADAA Editorial Board as well as the Corporate Council for Dimensions of Dental Hygiene. Mary is also a member of the Organization for Safety Asepsis and Prevention (OSAP).

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