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To: Dental Health Care Professionals

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Information for Dental Health Care Professionals (DHCP): What You Need to Know about Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

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Expanding outbreaks of respiratory illness (COVID-19) caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS CoV-2) are appearing in Wisconsin and across the United States. The virus is spreading from person-to-person and cases are confirmed across the United States.

There is evidence of community spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin. This means that there are people who have tested positive without any exposures to a known case or recent travel to a location where there is known community spread. Governor Evers has declared a public health emergency in Wisconsin and the Department of Health Services (DHS) has ordered a moratorium on mass gatherings with ten or more attendees to slow the spread of the virus in the community.

Background

What is a coronavirus?
Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in both humans and animals. There are currently seven strains of human coronaviruses that have been identified. Four of these strains are commonly found in Wisconsin and elsewhere around the world. These common human coronaviruses typically cause mild to moderate respiratory illness. Sometimes, new coronaviruses emerge.

In 2019, a new strain of human coronavirus (SARS CoV-2) has resulted in the emergence of a new disease, COVID-19. Illnesses associated with this virus were first reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. This strain is a concern because it appears to cause more severe illness in some people and, because it is new, very few people are immune to it.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19 illness?
People who have confirmed COVID-19 infections have a range of symptoms, from people with little to no symptoms to people being severely sick and dying. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after contact with someone who has COVID-19. **If you have been to an** affected geographic area **within the past two weeks and develop symptoms, call your doctor.**

How does the virus spread?
The main way COVID-19 is spread to others is when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus is found in droplets from the throat and nose. When someone coughs or sneezes, other people near them (3-6 feet away) can breathe in those droplets. The virus can also spread when someone touches an object with the virus on it (e.g., doorknobs, countertops, or any surface those droplets land on), and then touches their mouth, face, or eyes.

Should I Remain Open?
DHS strongly recommends that dental practices postpone all elective and non-urgent care treatment starting immediately until after the public health emergency has passed. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed guidance to assess the level of exposure risk of different occupations, and dentists performing aerosol-generating procedures on known or suspected COVID-19 patients are in the very highest category.

It is anticipated that Dental Health Care Professionals would continue to be available for emergency treatment, as needed. DHS realizes that defining emergency dental care can be difficult and subjective. We encourage dentists to use their clinical judgement based on experience and evidence-based practices. These decisions can be influenced by many factors, including:

- The likelihood of the problem getting worse.
- The need to alleviate pain or manage infection.
- The presence of pre-existing serious medical conditions.
- Challenges with diagnosing dental conditions over the phone. (Providers may consider asking patients to text a photo of the affected area to facilitate triage.)
- Patients at increased risk for adverse health outcomes from COVID-19, such as adults over 60 years old and those with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, or heart or lung disease.

Patients experiencing a dental emergency should not be directed to an emergency room, including after hours, unless they are experiencing a life-threatening emergency.

What can I do to slow or prevent COVID-19 illnesses in my workplace?
- Refer to CDC's Guidance for Employers for general workplace preventive recommendations. See here: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html
- ***Implement social distancing strategies*** that limit group size to 10 people or less and maintaining a distance of 6 feet between people when possible. Examples in practice can include:
  - Limiting or staggering patient appointments.
  - Requesting that patients do not show up early for their appointments or wait in their cars until their appointment time.
  - Remove from your waiting room magazines, reading materials, toys or other objects that may be touched by others and which are not easily disinfected.

- ***Screen patients for*** *[COVID-19 risk factors](link)*, such as travel to [locations with community spread](link) or close contact with individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, while updating their medical history. Be aware that patient response and symptoms to COVID-19 vary, so use your best clinical judgement and evidence-based guidelines during assessments.
- ***Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).***
  - Refer to [CDC guidance](link) on appropriate gowns, gloves, and respirators to use during the COVID-19 outbreak.
  - Because PPE is in short supply, implement [strategies for optimizing the supply of PPE](link) that you have. The state is actively working to get more PPE into the state.
  - When appropriate PPE is not available, consider lower protection level alternatives such as using a surgical mask, safety goggles with closed side shields, a full face shield, and disposable gowns and gloves.
- ***Use engineering controls*** such as performing procedures in a closed treatment room and not in an open concept operatory setting.
- ***Perform routine environmental cleaning.***
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
  - No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
  - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
  - If an individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 has visited your clinic, more [stringent environmental cleaning and disinfection protocols](link) should be followed.
  - For additional guidance and resources, please refer to the [OSHA guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19](link).
- ***Determine an appropriate facility for treatment*** for patients with suspected or known COVID-19 infection. The ideal would be an isolation room or Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIRs).

Where can I turn for more information?
- [Wisconsin Department of Health Services, COVID-19 webpage](link)

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 webpage](link)

- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration, COVID-19 webpage](link)

- [Environmental Protection Agency, COVID-19 webpage](link)

- [American Dental Association, COVID-19 Resource webpage](link)