

# Preparation for the Re-establishment of the General Dental Services - Operational Guidance

4 June 2020

## **Contents**

### 1.0 Introduction and Background

### 2.0 Practice Preparation

- 2.1 Access to the Dental Practice
- 2.2 Reception Area
- 2.3 Waiting Area
- 2.4 Toilet Facilities
- 2.5 Staff Areas
- 2.6 Equipment

### 3.0 Staff Preparation

- 3.1 Staff Leadership
- 3.2 Staff Training
- 3.3 Staff Screening
- 3.4 Uniforms
- 3.5 Staff Wellbeing

### 4.0 Patient Pathway

- 4.1 Patient COVID Screening
- 4.2 Patient Medical Screening
- 4.3 Appointment Planning
- 4.4 Patient Triage and Prioritisation
- 4.5 Patient Communications

### 5.0 Enhanced Cross-Infection Control Procedures

- 5.1 Surgery Preparation
- 5.2 Environmental Cleaning
- 5.3 Instrument Decontamination
- 5.4 Clinical Waste Management
- 5.5 Personal Protection Equipment
- 5.6 Aerosol Generating Procedures

### 6.0 Acknowledgements

## **1.0 Introduction and Background**

COVID-19 is a highly infectious severe acute respiratory syndrome caused by SARS-CoV-2. Due to the nature of dental treatment dental team members are at particular risk of developing COVID-19. As such health service dentists were informed by the Health and Social Care Board to restrict the provision of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) on 18 March 2020 and to cease all AGPs on 23 March 2020.

Since that date the provision of face-to-face treatment within general dental practice has been restricted to urgent and emergency dental conditions that cannot be managed remotely and in which a non-AGP can address the patient's dental need. Urgent Dental Care centres have been established to provide care and treatment to non-COVID patients who require an AGP, and to confirmed or possible COVID positive patients who require any form of face-to-face treatment.

This guidance document has been developed by the General Dental Services Re-establishment Group and contains operational guidance to assist practices in their preparations for a phased return to practice as outlined in the letter issued on 2 June 2020 by the Acting Chief Dental Officer available at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3111.htm>

This set of guidance focuses on the implementation of social distancing within dental practices, preparation of staff, and the implementation of enhanced cross-infection control procedures. Preliminary guidance in relation to the patient pathway is also included which will be supplemented in due course to assist dental practitioners as they prioritise their time.

The measures to facilitate social distancing of staff and patients in dental practices will be influenced by the size, layout and location of the practice and as such each practice will need to develop their own policies and procedures following review of this guidance.

As the situation is continually progressing, and specific measures may change, it is recommended that the following webpages be reviewed regularly:

BSO Dental COVID Webpage: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3111.htm>

PHA COVID Webpage: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus>

NI Direct COVID Webpage: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

PHE Advice for Health Professionals:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>

## **2.0 Practice Preparation**

The development and implementation of new policies and procedures will help ensure professional and public confidence that dental practices are as safe an environment as before the COVID-19 pandemic. As such practices should consider the following actions to facilitate social distancing within dental practices.

### **2.1 Access to the Dental Practice**

- Access to the practice could be restricted to patients with pre-booked appointments
- Patients could be advised to attend alone and to minimise any personal belongings brought into the practice
- Patients could be advised to attend close to their appointment time
- Paediatric and vulnerable patients could be accompanied by one person with parental or caring responsibility. If additional carers are required this may be agreed prior to the appointment
- If car parking facilities are available patients may be advised to wait in their car prior to being invited in for their appointment
- A one-way system within the practice could be considered with separate entrance and exits
- Separate entrances for staff and patients could be considered
- Patients could be met at the door and guided through the practice
  - This guide should wear PPE (fluid resistant mask plus optional face visor following risk assessment)
- Interpreting services to be provided through The Big Word telephone interpretation service. Further information is available at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2730.htm>
- Provide hand hygiene facilities for patients as they enter and exit the practice
- Information posters in relation to COVID diagnosis, social distancing, cough etiquette and hand hygiene should be on display outside, or at the entrance to the practice, and in the waiting area (please refer to section 4.5)

### **2.2 Reception Area**

- Re-organise reception area to allow social distancing of staff and patients
- Perspex screens to be considered if necessary
- Receptionist to wear PPE (fluid resistant mask plus optional face visor following risk assessment) if necessary
- Minimise the time patients stay in reception
  - Appointments could made over the phone and not in person
  - Consider contactless payments or payment over the phone
  - Paperwork could be emailed to the practice or to the patient if possible

- HS45 forms do not need signed until further notice (patient consent should be recorded in the clinical records)
- Communication between the reception and the surgeries could be optimised to control movement of patients and staff within the practice
- Reception area and equipment to be disinfected regularly
- Provide hand hygiene facilities for reception staff
- If paperwork is required consider asking patients to bring their own pen

### 2.3 Waiting Area

- Avoid the use of the waiting area if possible by taking patients directly to the surgery
- Reorganise waiting area with 2m distancing between chairs
- Use floor markings to indicate 2m distancing if necessary
- Remove all unnecessary fixtures e.g. magazines, toys, drinks dispensers
- Frequent cleaning throughout the day
- Ensure that tissues and a foot-pedal operated bin are available

### 2.4 Toilet Facilities

- Use of toilets to be restricted as far as possible
- Patients to be advised to use the bathroom prior to attending the practice
- Display signage on handwashing techniques (please refer to section 4.5)
- Disable hand dryers and provide disposable towels and a foot-pedal operated bin
- To be disinfected after use
- Information posters in relation to cough etiquette and hand hygiene should be on display (please refer to section 4.5)

### 2.5 Staff Areas

- Social distancing of staff should be considered
- Use of staff rooms could be minimised
- Staff rooms could be re-organised to allow social distancing

### 2.6 Equipment

It is advised that practices review the Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Programme “Practice Reopening Checklist” prior to an increase in the number of patients attending the practice. The checklist is available at:

<http://www.sdcep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SDCEP-Dental-Practice-Reopening-Following-COVID-19-checklist-250520.docx>

### **3.0 Staff Preparation**

#### **3.1 Staff Leadership**

Each practice should have nominated a COVID-19 lead as part of their COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan. The COVID-19 lead should:

- Review updated and newly published guidance
- Disseminate information to members of the dental team
- Consider the impact on existing practice policies and procedures
- Develop new practice policies and procedures if necessary
- Review and update the Business Continuity Plan as necessary including plans for patients to access care in the event of the practice having to close
- Consider necessary staff training

#### **3.2 Staff Training**

Staff training could be considered in regards to:

- The COVID-19 case definition
- COVID-19 guidance (e.g. social distancing of patients and staff)
- Management of a possible COVID positive patient
- Practice policies and procedures to facilitate social distancing
- Enhanced Cross-infection Control measures
- Environmental cleaning
- Clinical clothing
- Use of PPE
- Hand hygiene
- Management of medical emergencies
- Safeguarding

#### **3.3 Staff Screening**

- Procedures should be developed to ensure staff inform the practice of any COVID-19 symptoms or if a member of their household develops symptoms and to follow self-isolation advice
  - Please refer to section 4.1 for further details
  - Further information in regards to the diagnosis of COVID-19 is available at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public> and <https://check.covid-19.hscni.net/>

- The process for the testing of symptomatic healthcare workers is outlined at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/coronavirus-national-testing-programme-essential-or-key-workers>
- The online testing portal is available at <https://self-referral.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/>
- Information in relation to the Test Trace and Protect Strategy is available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Test-Trace-Protect-Support-Strategy.pdf>
- Staff should follow any personal medical advice given to them
- Risk assessments should be considered for vulnerable staff with redeployment to duties without patient contact considered
  - Further advice for health care workers with underlying medical conditions is available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-health-care-workers-underlying-health-conditions>
  - Further advice for pregnant health care workers is available at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/>
  - Further advice for the employers of pregnant healthcare workers is available at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/2020-05-22-occupational-health-advice-for-employers-and-pregnant-women-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.pdf>
- Practice policies in regards to the management of staff absence may require review

### 3.4 Uniforms

- Clinical clothing worn during the provision of dental treatment and decontamination should not be worn outside of the practice
- Clinical clothing should be short sleeved
- Clinical clothing should be washed at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric at the earliest opportunity

### 3.5 Staff Wellbeing

Dentists and their staff have had to make dramatic changes to their professional and personal lives during the COVID-19 pandemic with resulting stress and anxiety. Practices should be mindful of the wellbeing of everyone who works in the practice.

Roz McMullan, Chair of Probing Stress in Dentistry, has shared some advice and resources which is available at:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Ltr%20from%20Roz%20McMullan%20Chair%20Probing%20Stress%20in%20Dentistry%20Group%2006.05.20.pdf>

Other resources available to dental practitioners include:

- The Inspire General Dental Services Assistance Programme is available confidentially 24 hours a day at 0800 3895362 with further info available at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3078.htm>
- BDA members may contact Health Assured 24 hours a day as part of the BDA Member Assistance Programme at 0800 0305182 with further info available at <https://bda.org/health-assured>

Resources available to all members of the dental team include:

- “Take 5 Against Covid” available at
- <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-hsc-staff-healthcare-workers-and-care-providers/staff-health-and>

Resources available to the general public include:

- PHA stress control classes available at <https://stresscontrol.org/>
- Helplines NI: <https://helplinesni.com/>
- Health Care Apps: <https://apps4healthcareni.hscni.net/>
- Lifeline Crisis Response: 0808 808 8000
- Samaritans: 116 123

## **4.0 Patient Pathway**

### **4.1 Patient COVID Screening**

Patients who are confirmed or possible COVID-19 positive should not be examined within general dental practice. As such it is suggested that the following questions be asked for all patients prior to booking an appointment and prior to their attendance:

- Have you tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 7 days?
- Have you had any of the following symptoms in the past 7 days?
  - A new persistent cough (coughing for more than an hour or more than three coughing episodes in a 24 hour period)
  - A high temperature or fever



- Loss of, or altered, sense of smell or taste
- Has anyone in your household had any of the same symptoms in the past 14 days?
- Have you been advised to self-isolate as part of the “Test, Trace and Protect” strategy?

Patients who answer “Yes” to any of the above patient screening questions the patient should not attend or enter the practice. If treatment cannot be postponed then referral to an Urgent Dental Care centre should be considered in line with the advice paper “Dental Care in General Dental practice and UDCs during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Patients should be advised to follow any personal medical advice they receive. A patient is deemed to be “recovered” following their period of self-isolation as long as it has been seven days since the onset of symptoms and they no longer have a high temperature. The cough and altered sense of smell or taste may persist in some patients despite being “recovered” and COVID free.

Further information in regards to the case definition of COVID-19 is available at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public> and <https://check.covid-19.hscni.net/>

#### 4.2 Patient Medical Screening

- Consideration should be given to updating medical histories prior to the booking of an appointment
- For patients who are shielding or vulnerable consideration should be given to treating remotely or postponing treatment if possible
- Where an appointment is necessary consideration should be given to scheduling the appointment at the start of a session
- Further information in regards to shielding and vulnerable people is available at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-vulnerable-people>

#### 4.3 Appointment Planning

- Appointment lengths should be sufficiently long to allow for enhanced cleaning between appointments
- Staggering of appointments could be considered to facilitate social distancing of patients
  - This may include flexible working hours with staggering staff start/end times, break times and lunch times

- As per section 4.2 consideration should be given to scheduling appointments for shielding or vulnerable patients at the start of a session
- Consideration could be given to a single dental team working across two or more surgeries to optimise appointment times and reduce the number of staff present in the practice
- As per section 5.2 sufficient time should be allowed for enhanced environmental cleaning including the application, “contact time” and “drying time” of the disinfectant

#### 4.4 Patient Triage and Prioritisation

Further guidance will be issued to practitioners to assist them in prioritising patients during this time in which the number of patients who can be seen may be reduced

#### 4.5 Patient Communications

- Practices should consider updating practice communications to inform patients of the changes to the delivery of dental services
- Patients should be given relevant instructions prior to attendance
- Information posters are available in relation to COVID diagnosis, social distancing, cough etiquette and hand hygiene should be on display
  - PHA posters are available at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications?keys=coronavirus&page=0>
  - COVID Diagnosis posters: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/isolate-your-household-campaign-poster-and-translations>
  - Social Distancing posters: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/social-distancing-poster>  
[https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/Covid19\\_KeepDistance\\_A3\\_Poster\\_PHA\\_04\\_20.pdf](https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-04/Covid19_KeepDistance_A3_Poster_PHA_04_20.pdf)
  - Cough Etiquette poster: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/Catch%20it%20bin%20it%20kill%20it%20SQUARE.png>
  - Hand Hygiene posters: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/covid-19-posters-pharmacies-and-gp-surgeries>

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/coronavirus-wash-your-hands-poster>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/886217/Best\\_practice\\_hand\\_wash.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/886217/Best_practice_hand_wash.pdf)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/886216/Best\\_practice\\_hand\\_rub.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/886216/Best_practice_hand_rub.pdf)

- HSCB patient information webpages are available at:  
<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/integrated-care/dental-services/>  
<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/coronavirus/#Dental>  
<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/phased-return-dental-services/>

## **5.0 Enhanced Cross-Infection Control Procedures**

### **5.1 Surgery Preparation**

- All unnecessary objects and equipment should be removed from surgeries
- Barriers should be considered where possible
- All necessary equipment and materials should be prepared prior to the appointment
- Doors should be closed during treatment and decontamination
- Windows may be opened
- PPE should be donned prior to the patient entering the surgery
- Ideally only the dental team (dentist and dental nurse) and the patient should be present during treatment with the surgery door closed
  - A designated “runner” may be required if further equipment is required
  - Exceptions may be required for patients attending with a guardian or carer and should be recorded in the clinical notes
- Consideration should be given to “clinical bubbles” with dentists working, where possible, with the same dental nurse to limit contact between staff members
- Particular attention should be given to hand hygiene throughout
- Open surgeries with multiple dental chairs in a single room should be arranged to ensure social distancing is maintained

### **5.2 Environmental Cleaning**

- Decontamination of the dental surgery following a non-AGP should follow existing practice policies and procedures as per HTM 01-05 and should follow

the manufacturer's guidance. HTM 01-05 is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/decontamination-in-primary-care-dental-practices>

- Further COVID specific Cross-Infection Control advice is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>
  - This guidance recommends cleaning all hard surfaces which may have become contaminated with a combined detergent/disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1000 parts per million available chlorine or a general purpose neutral detergent in warm water followed by a disinfectant solution of 1000 parts per million available chlorine
  - Products must be used according to manufacturer's instructions and recommended "contact times" and "drying times" must be followed
  - Disposable cloths, wipes, or paper towels are advised
  - Reusable equipment should be disinfected after use and stored in an enclosed container
- Appointment times should be adequate to allow enhanced environmental cleaning between patients
- Particular care should be given to the cleaning of open surgeries with multiple dental chairs
- PPE should be worn as per section 5.5

### 5.3 Instrument Decontamination

- Decontamination of re-useable dental instruments should follow existing practice policies and procedures as per HTM 01-05
- Staff should wear PPE as per section 5.5
- Staff should be aware of social distancing in the local decontamination room
- Dental water lines should be flushed as per existing practice policies and procedures

### 5.4 Clinical Waste Management

- The management of clinical waste should follow existing practice policies and procedures
- Practices should consider a potential increase in the volume of clinical waste due to increased PPE requirements and enhanced cross-infection control procedures

### 5.5 Personal Protection Equipment

- The necessary personal protection equipment for non-Aerosol Generating Procedures, environmental decontamination, and the decontamination of reusable dental instruments includes:
  - Disposable gloves
  - Disposable plastic apron
  - Fluid resistant surgical face mask<sup>1</sup>
  - Eye/face protection (visors, shields, or glasses/goggles)
- Sessional use of fluid resistant surgical face masks and eye/face protection may be appropriate following risk assessment
- Re-useable eye protection should be cleaned and decontaminated as per manufacturer's instructions
- Further information in relation to necessary PPE for non-AGPS is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/878750/T2\\_poster\\_Recommended\\_PPE\\_for\\_primary\\_outpatient\\_community\\_and\\_social\\_care\\_by\\_setting.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878750/T2_poster_Recommended_PPE_for_primary_outpatient_community_and_social_care_by_setting.pdf)
- Advice in regards to the donning and doffing of PPE is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-use-for-non-aerosol-generating-procedures>
- Receptionists should wear fluid resistant masks if it is not possible to maintain social distancing in the reception area
  - Sessional use may be appropriate following risk assessment

## 5.6 Aerosol Generating Procedures

Advice specific to the provision of AGPs including PPE and enhanced cross-infection control measures will be shared in due course

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that most standard dental masks are fluid resistant. Practitioners should check their stock to ensure that their masks are "IIR Compliant."

## **6.0 Acknowledgements**

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