

Infection Prevention and Control in Dentistry 2023:

5 GO-TO STRATEGIES TO REACH COMPLIANCE



 **HENRY SCHEIN**[®]
DENTAL

KEY OPINION LEADER AND CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR
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Long before COVID-19 entered into our collective vocabulary, dentists and dental team members were focused on what needed to be done every day inside the practice to not only keep their patients safe, but to keep each other safe as well.

When HIV and AIDS first became well known in our society in the 1980s and 1990s, dental practices changed their ways of protecting patients based on the directions contained in the formal infection control guidelines by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), unveiled in 1986. In the age of COVID-19 and other emerging infections, dental practices once again looked to experts from the CDC and other government agencies for best practices in staying safe.

It is incumbent for dental practices to not only maintain the highest infection control and safety standards, but to also explain and demonstrate to patients the great lengths dental professionals go every day to stay safe, even in the midst of a pandemic. With today's news cycle and access to the internet and social media, patients are more aware than ever before of what is going on around them, and the impact those circumstances can have on their overall health and well-being. By showing patients what you are doing to keep them safe, any hesitancy regarding their visit will be lowered considerably.

So, what are you doing to keep patients safe today?

Are your practice's safety and infection control standards at a high level — or is there room for improvement? Is every team member, including the dentist, up to date with the latest guidelines and protocols?

If there is any hesitancy to answering the previous questions, the good news is that there are experts in the field who can help you tighten up any areas involving safety that need improving. We have consulted with several of those experts for this e-book to help you — and your patients — have greater peace of mind every time you step into your dental practice.

DO: Consider a membership in the Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention (OSAP). Founded in 1984, OSAP is the only dental membership association for oral health care professionals that focuses exclusively on dental infection prevention, as well as patient and provider safety.

1 / PROPER TRAINING

Let's start with the first step on the journey to the highest safety standards: Proper training.

Proper training sets the foundation for tackling everyday duties regarding infection control in the practice, as well as being prepared if any kind of incident were to occur.

But it's not just about training. It's about receiving the right training from the right people. That's where it is important for every dental practice to receive their infection control and safety training from someone who is knowledgeable in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and current CDC guidelines.

Consider the options for what kind of training on infection control and safety policies, guidelines and daily duties you will have available for new team members. Among those options is having other team members share their knowledge with their new colleagues through training. Working together as a team to share knowledge and learn from each other is always important, but also consider backing up that teamwork with outside training that not only reinforces what was taught, but also serves as a good refresher for everyone in the practice. By combining learning opportunities from internal and external sources, new team members will have a wealth of infection control and prevention knowledge at their disposal.

With today's news cycle and access to the internet and social media, patients are more aware than ever before of what is going on around them.

Infection control training should be part of every dental practice's annual agenda. Having a time set aside for an expert to come into your practice and remind the entire team about best practices can ensure that everyone is operating at a high level when it comes to infection control.

Don't forget: When a new team member is brought on board, it's important to make sure he or she is up to date on infection control practices and protocols before ever beginning to work in the operatory or sterilization area. Never assume that a new team member understands all there is to know about the level of infection control and prevention you aspire to attain in your practice.

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Proper training reduces two big considerations for your business:

1. **It reduces the opportunities for any incidents or breaches to occur.** When dental team members are confident in their knowledge of infection control and safety protocols, they will be less likely to make a mistake or “look the other way” if something isn’t being done correctly.
2. **It reduces the chance for any kind of liability if/when something goes wrong.** By showing that proper training occurred, the business can protect itself in the event of an incident.

As a note, more and more dental practices are starting to utilize one of their current team members as an infection control coordinator (ICC). According to OSAP, “The infection control coordinator may have responsibilities within a larger job position (safety director, employing dentist, dental assistant, office manager, etc.). At a minimum, the ICC should have a basic understanding of modes of cross-contamination in dentistry, infection prevention and general safety procedures, as well as products and equipment available to maintain employee and patient safety.”

Having a point person to oversee OSHA and infection control training and maintain the highest standards of safety for all team members may be something to consider for your practice. This person would act as a conduit between your practice’s training and everyday safety activities, helping to ensure everyone is operating at the highest level.

2 / COMMUNICATION

Communicating with experts and each other in the dental practice is vital when it comes to learning about infection control and prevention, as well as maintaining a high degree of safety.

Let’s start at the highest level of oversight in workplace safety matters and work our way down the communication ladder.

We’ll begin with OSHA. As part of the U.S. Department of Labor, Congress created OSHA to ensure safe, healthful

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OSAP recommends that every dental practice have an infection control coordinator.

working conditions for workers by setting and enforcing standards, and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance. Federal OSHA regulations apply to all states unless they have opted to have a state-directed plan. There are currently 22 OSHA-approved state plans covering both private sector and state and local government workers. The remainder have developed their own plans. But rest assured, state plans are required to have standards and enforcement programs that are at least as effective as federal OSHA in preventing work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths.

DO: With so many different state plans out there, make sure you are working with a trainer who is knowledgeable on how OSHA impacts your state.

From the national and state level to the local level, let’s focus on the importance of communication within the practice, especially when it comes to the realistic hazards of working in a dental practice every day.

There are several hazards that should not only be discussed with every employee, but understood by them as well.

1. **Needlesticks** — The [Bloodborne Pathogens Standard](#)  provides clear guidance on what to do in the event of an accidental exposure.

2. Bloodborne pathogens —

According to OSHA, bloodborne pathogens are infectious microorganisms in human blood that can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include, but are not limited to, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

3. Hazard communication —

Among the common chemicals used in dental practices are glutaraldehyde, glutaraldehyde with phenol, hydrogen peroxide, alcohols (ethyl and isopropyl), oxidizers (bleach) and formaldehyde. Proper handling of each of these on a daily basis is critical, as is ensuring that any pharmaceuticals kept in the practice cannot be accessed by anyone without proper credentials.

4. OSHA-regulated safety areas —

Employees should also understand other areas of safety regulated by OSHA, including egress, electrical, fire, personal protective equipment (PPE), first aid and working surfaces, as well as ionizing and non-ionizing radiation.

So, what needs to be ready in your practice in the event that an incident occurs?

First, your safety data sheet (SDS) binder must be updated. Under OSHA regulations, dental practices are required to maintain an SDS for every hazardous material in the practice.

Second, a written hazard communication program must be in place. This can include the methods your practice uses to inform employees of the requirements of OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (HCS), as well as the hazards of chemicals and how employees can protect themselves. Additionally, it can include information and training on hazardous substances used by each employee in

their work area at the time of their initial assignment and whenever a new hazard is introduced.

Third, an exposure control plan must be in place. What happens in the event of an exposure? Who is responsible once an exposure has occurred? These are among some of the questions within the exposure control plan that must be accessible to employees at all times.

As a reminder, make sure you are working with a knowledgeable safety and compliance trainer to ensure these items (as well as all training materials) are in place.

Above all, everyone on the team must understand proper protocols and steps in the event of an exposure. This is where training, communication and teamwork play a vital role.

3 / EXPOSURE

Although most dental practice employees follow strict infection control and accident prevention protocols, accidents may still happen in the practice.

An important benefit for employees that must be provided by all dental practice owners is hepatitis B immunization, as well as baseline testing for tuberculosis. Having these preventive measures in place will not only allow for peace of mind should an incident occur, but also demonstrate to current and potential employees that their safety is of prime importance.

As previously mentioned, it is critical to have an exposure control plan in place. This is extremely important in the event of a needlestick injury. It is also required that, if exposure occurs in the practice, the business offers postexposure treatment and counseling to any affected employee.

5 WAYS TO PREVENT SHARPS AND NEEDLE-STICK INJURIES

From www.osha.gov

Use safe and effective needle alternatives when available

Plan safe handling and disposal before any procedure

Complete bloodborne pathogens training

Activate the device's safety features

Immediately dispose of contaminated needles in OSHA-compliant sharps containers

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Among the requirements that must be in an exposure control plan include:

- A description of hazards in your workplace
- Information on tasks that could expose employees
- Identification of employees that may be exposed
- PPE that must be used
- How/where to obtain the required PPE

Additionally, making sure that your dental practice has a functioning eyewash station is critical. It is required that an eyewash station be located within 55 feet of any chemical hazard. In most dental practices, this means that one or two functioning eyewash stations will suffice.

It's essential to have an inventory that can be easily accessed in the event of an emergency.

4 / INVENTORY OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

One of the more overlooked dental office safety issues involves chemicals that are found in your facility.










It's essential to have an inventory that can be easily accessed in the event of an emergency. Part of the inventory process should include making sure that all potentially hazardous products/chemicals are properly labeled.

Hazard communication training is extremely important, as employees must be knowledgeable about where chemicals are located and understand how to use those chemicals safely.

5 / HAZARD COMMUNICATION LABELING

Proper labeling of potentially hazardous chemicals/products is essential for compliance and safety. There are nine pictograms that are part of the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) for hazard communication labeling utilized by OSHA, and all employees should be familiar with them.

They are as follows:

<p>Health hazard</p>	<p>Flame</p>	<p>Exclamation mark</p>
<p> A cancer-causing agent (carcinogen) or substance with respiratory, reproductive or organ toxicity that causes damage over time (a chronic or long-term health hazard).</p>	<p> Flammable materials or substances liable to self-ignite when exposed to water or air (pyrophoric), or which emit flammable gas.</p>	<p> An immediate skin, eye or respiratory tract irritant or narcotic.</p>
<p>Gas cylinder</p>	<p>Corrosion</p>	<p>Exploding bomb</p>
<p> Gases stored under pressure, such as ammonia or liquid nitrogen.</p>	<p> Materials causing skin corrosion/burns or eye damage on contact, or that are corrosive to metals.</p>	<p> Explosives, including organic peroxides and highly unstable material at risk of exploding even without exposure to air (self-reactives).</p>
<p>Flame over circle</p>	<p>Skull and crossbones</p>	<p>Environmental hazard</p>
<p> Identifies oxidizers, which are chemicals that facilitate burning or make fires burn hotter and longer.</p>	<p> Substances, such as poisons and highly concentrated acids, which have an immediate and severe toxic effect (acute toxicity).</p>	<p> Chemicals toxic to aquatic wildlife.</p>

It is critical that anyone in the dental practice who comes into contact with chemicals understands these labels, as well as the potential hazards and safe work practices associated with each.



Dental team in treatment room with proper PPE.

CONCLUSION

There are two important steps to all infection control and prevention protocols in every dental practice.

First, work ahead of time with training and preparation so that each employee is as knowledgeable as possible about the risks he or she faces every day and how those risks can be avoided or lessened.

Second, when an issue occurs in the practice, it is important to have excellent communication and protocols in place to rely upon. By having a plan in place in the event an exposure occurs, employees can have the knowledge and skills

necessary to make those moments as safe and stress-free as possible.

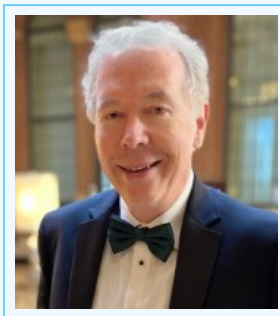
These two steps require dental practices to work with qualified trainers who can provide detailed, correct information during any training session, and can also be used as a resource throughout the year for both current and new employees.

DO: Rely on your Henry Schein Dental sales representative to help put you in touch with the right training company, as well as provide you with all of your infection control and safety needs.

DO NOT: Rely on what you read on social media to provide accurate information for what should or should not be done in the dental practice when it comes to safety and infection control.

DO: Explore sites such as www.cdc.gov and www.osap.org to find specific resources for dentistry and to gather more ideas on how to raise your level of knowledge when it comes to safety and compliance.

Safety should be everyone's focus in the practice. By avoiding common mistakes, dental practices can concentrate on the primary job at hand: improving the oral health and lives of their patients. ▀



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Karson L. Carpenter serves as president of Compliance Training Partners. He is an OSHA-authorized trainer who has for over 25 years designed educational programs to bring dental facilities into compliance with the governmental regulations that affect them in the areas of OSHA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and infection control. His experience includes guiding numerous clients across the U.S. through OSHA and HIPAA inspections, as well as the critical post-inspection process.

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RESOURCES:

OSHA — www.osha.gov/dentistry 

OSAP — www.osap.org 

CDC — www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/index 

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) list of registered disinfectants

www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/selected-epa-registered-disinfectants 

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