



## Practice Interruption Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Based on recommendations and guidance from the CDC, the governor's office and the California Department of Public Health, CDA is advising dental practices to limit patient treatment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is recommended that dentists practicing in California voluntarily suspend non-urgent dental care for the next 14 days (as of 3/15/20). CDA has several resources available to assist members with this pandemic, including the FAQ attached. .

### **Why restrict your dental practice to urgent care?**

In short, to help "flatten the curve" and ensure the continued health of your patients, your staff and you. The COVID-19 pandemic is putting a strain on all health care facilities and resources locally and nationally due to the increasing number of affected individuals. Service to the public is the primary obligation of the dentist as a health care professional and limiting or closing your practice temporarily will help meet that obligation.

### **What do I tell my staff/team?**

Here's some suggested language:

In order to ensure the continued health of our patients, we are suspending non-urgent dental care for the next 14 days. The health and welfare of our patients and our staff are the utmost priority and we want to do our part to limit the spread of the coronavirus, to reduce patient hospitalizations and lessen the strain on resources needed to treat patients. I value your assistance in making this a smooth transition. I appreciate your commitment to working together to get through this difficult time.

Address payroll and benefits for members of your staff during the practice interruption. See the Practice Interruption FAQ for common questions regarding your responsibilities as an employer.

### **How do I notify my patients of the shift in provision of dental services for the time being?**

Contact patients via phone, email and text and reschedule their appointments for a later date. Explain the reason for the change. Additionally, a sample closure announcement is provided on the next page, which you may mail, email and text to your patients in addition to posting on your website and social media pages:

## Sample Practice Interruption Announcement

Announcement from [insert dentist or dental practice name]:

### NOTICE OF TEMPORARY CHANGE TO DENTAL CARE APPOINTMENT AVAILABILITY

Our top priority is the health and well-being of our patients, families, staff and community. In this unprecedented time, we are deeply committed to keeping everyone safe.

In light of the evolving pandemic and out of an abundance of caution, we have decided to limit patient treatment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our office is heeding recommendations to voluntarily suspend non-urgent dental care until [\_\_\_\_\_]. We believe that this shift will allow us to more effectively evaluate this dynamic situation and assist in following the CDC's guidance on social separation. If you have an appointment scheduled with us this week or next, our office will be in touch to help reschedule your appointment.

There will be a dentist on call in the event of a dental emergency. Should you require urgent dental care, please call our office as you normally would and one of our dentists will contact you.

We did not make this decision lightly. A great deal of care, research and planning guided our decision. We will continue to evaluate the situation as it evolves and determine on a weekly basis when it is appropriate for us to return to our normal business hours.

Again, please understand that we are making this decision with the health and well-being of our patients, our families, our team and our community in mind.

We wish all of you continued health and strength during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

[name of dentist(s)]

## How do I ensure my patients can receive emergency care during this time?

You are obligated to make reasonable arrangements for the emergency care of your patients of record. A charge of patient abandonment may result from a failure to make reasonable arrangements. Also, dental benefit plans require contracted providers to make arrangements for after-hours emergency care of their patients.

Examples of reasonable arrangements include:

- Arranging for emergency coverage with one or more colleagues in the event that you are unable to provide treatment due to incapacitation. Notify your patients in advance and provide your colleagues' contact information or that of your answering service.
- Leave an outgoing message on your telephone answering system that provides instructions on how a patient can contact you or the colleague who is providing emergency coverage.
- If using an answering service, instruct the operator to collect information from the patient that includes full name, date seen by the dentist, complaint and a phone number.
- Ensure you have a method of verifying patients of record or verifying patients of colleagues for whom you are providing emergency coverage.

If a patient has reached out for urgent or emergent care, triage the patient over the telephone as you normally would. However, implement the additional [COVID-19 patient screening questions](#) to assess whether the patient should be seen in your practice or referred to their medical provider for potential COVID-19 testing or treatment. In the event the patient has COVID-19 symptoms or has been recently exposed to the virus, direct the patient to contact their physician immediately or arrange to be seen at the local hospital.

You are not required to see an emergency patient in the middle of the night. If a patient in pain contacts you in the middle of the night, refer the patient to a hospital emergency room or urgent care facility for pain relief and direct the patient to present at your office at the earliest possible time.

Be sure to keep a record of these after-hours consultations.

**Patients not of record:** When consulted in an emergency by a patient not of record, you are obligated to make reasonable arrangements for emergency care of that patient, including screening for COVID-19 symptoms. Consulting with a patient for the first time in an emergency does not make the individual a patient of record.

Do not leave an outgoing message directing emergency patients to contact the local dental society, unless the dental society has agreed to handle and has implemented a plan for handling such calls. Check with your dental society for more information.

You cannot advise patients to call 911 only, with no other options available to them. This is a misuse of the 911 system (refer to [Penal Code section 653y](#)). If the patient thinks they are having a medical emergency, you can tell them to call 911, but you must provide other alternatives for the patient to receive emergency dental care. If you need assistance finding options for your patients, reach out to colleagues to see if they are available to assist your patient base, ask what their methods are for these situations or consider hiring an answering service. A Google search will provide you with some options. If using an answering service, be certain the service signs a HIPAA business associate agreement.

## **CDA Code of Ethics**

### Section 8: Emergency Service

A dentist has the obligation to make reasonable arrangements for the emergency care of his or her patients of record.

#### Advisory Opinion:

8.A.1. Continuity of care: In the interest of preserving the patient's continuity of care, a dentist who treats a patient not of record shall recommend to the patient to continue treatment with the original treating dentist unless the patient expressly reveals a different preference.

**Other considerations for practice interruption:**

- Arrange for security at the dental office to ensure patient records, financial documents, contracts, etc., are safely stored.
- Forward postal service if someone is not regularly at the office to check for incoming mail.
- Notify mutual aid organization, if applicable.
- If applicable, notify landlord or tenants of temporary office closure per terms of any agreement.
- Notify suppliers and service providers of shifts in office hours.
- Ensure proper disposal of hazardous and medical waste.
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