



Infection Control Through the Eyes of Your Patient

Incorporating new sterilization protocols to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is taking place in dental offices around the world. Practice owners and their teams have access to recommendations from the [ADA](#), [CDC](#), OSHA, state health departments, and regulatory agencies. While designed to keep patients safe, do your new protocols change the patient's perception of safety? In addition to implementing your new safety standards and infection control protocols, implement communication strategies to relieve anxiety and foster trust to deepen the patient-provider relationship.

Patient Communication

- Send a letter of reassurance to your patient base that outlines what you are doing to keep them safe. ([Example Reassurance Letter Link- Patient Scripting](#))
- Utilize social media channels to highlight new safety measures you are implementing. ([Example social media posts link - Patient Scripting](#))
- Communicate safety measures verbally to patients during patient scheduling, confirmation of appointments, and in the operator. ([See Patient Scripting](#))
- Consider adding a per-visit PPE fee, through D1999, to cover the cost of additional PPE. The added fee may provide added peace of mind that you are taking additional precautions.
- As part of your commitment to keep your patients informed of safety measures you're taking, consider providing a published list of safety protocols to your patients at their request.
- Post a notice on your website, social media channels, and in the practice that you are closely monitoring and strictly observing all recommendations from the ADA, CDC, and regulatory agencies in your area to include your local health department. Let them know COVID-19 response efforts are updating regularly and changes in the practice may occur as recommendations change. This reassures your patient base you are not complacent and will actively respond as the situation dictates changes.



Reception Area

Visual Cues Patients Observe

- Post a sign on the door that explains new check in protocols; the entrance is limited to protect patients and hand sanitization is required at entry. These instructions provide comfort to patients as they learn you are requiring this of everyone, which protects them in the process. ([Sample Door Sign](#))
- Clean carpets and walls indicate an environment that appears sterile. If needed, repaint and clean flooring. Your patient will notice these details while they may not notice added sterilization protocols that are happening behind the scenes.
- Remove or rearrange chairs in the reception area to promote social distancing.
- Place a barrier at the front desk, or indicate a 6-foot distance on the floor, to let patients know where to stand when they arrive. They will feel just as protected as the front desk staff will.
- Remove all magazines, toys, and clutter from the reception area. Clutter can project an unsterile environment. This is important even if you choose to have patients wait in their vehicle for treatment; they will take in visual cues from the moment they enter the practice.
- Turn the coffee bar into a patient care station with pop-up tissues, hand sanitizer, and a foot-activated, or no-touch, trash receptacle. Display the [CDC Cover Your Cough poster](#).
- Arrange for a staff member to regularly wipe down door handles, countertops, light switches, etc., as recommended by the [ADA COVID-19 Resources](#). Patients that observe this practice will gain a sense of comfort; do not wait for them to leave to perform added sterilization duties.

Verbal Reassurance

- Follow the [ADA Return to Work Interim Guidance Toolkit](#) to screen patients and take temperatures; let them know you are also taking the temperature of staff members each morning.
- Let them know you are limiting entrance into the clinic.
- Verbally reassure each patient of the additional steps you are taking to protect them.



Clinical Area

Visual Cues Patients Observe

- Remove all clutter from operatory countertops. An empty, clean countertop looks more sterile than one with models, pictures, mirrors, before-and-after books, and personal items displayed.
- Wash or sanitize your hands and don gloves in front of the patient.
- Leave instruments in sterilized pouches or wrapped cassettes on top of the patient tray and open in front of the patient.
- Place secure lids on mobile tubs of supplies that are in the Op for use during the procedure. Many patients will have a heightened awareness of cross contamination and monitor your actions closely.
- Protect the privacy of the Op by not allowing additional guests, or team members, to enter during treatment. Companions of patients may wait in their vehicles unless needed for translation critical to the patient's care.

Verbal Reassurance

- Reassure the patient when opening sterilized instruments in front of the patient.
"Please know that the instruments in this operatory are sterilized and reserved only for your use. This is not a new guideline for us; it is the way we have always done business. In light of the COVID-19 spread, I just want to reassure you this is, always was, and always will be our standard."
- Verbalize additional steps the practice has taken in light of the virus.
"As an added precaution, we are now using medical grade air purifiers, additional personal protective equipment as you can see, stronger suctioning systems..."

Offer Teledentistry

- Make patients aware of your ability to offer teledentistry as a means to provide a safe screening or exam. Highlight this on your website and social media channels. Providing this technology reassures the patient you are willing to make changes and evolve to meet safety demands. While HIPAA regulations have been temporarily relaxed during the pandemic so no special technology is needed, consider integrating HIPAA compliant offerings now, so you are ready for the future. Simplifeye and Dentulu, are two options.