

Patient Safeguards in our Dental Clinic

Summer 2024

As a team, we are reminded that caring for patients through the pandemic has been our privilege and responsibility, operating under extraordinary conditions. Recently, our regulatory body (Canadian Dental Association) stated that due to the collective diligence as a profession, there hasn't been any documented cases of COVID-19 transmission between a patient and an oral health care provider in Canada to date.

What makes West Calgary Dental Group different and what are patients and staff looking for that we provide?

75 years ago, when the office was established, the dentists knew that individual rooms with walls separating patients would be of benefit not only for privacy but certainly for infection prevention control.

We have observed the key considerations (guidelines) for Dental Practices moving through the COVID-19 pandemic. The dental, hygiene and assisting Colleges instituted the Guidelines, under the direction of Alberta Health, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Guidelines provided interim consideration and much of the patient and clinical content was informed by the ADAC Standards of Practice

Additional content supported the Chief Medical Officer of Health Order for businesses and entities which included general guidance. It is recognized that the pandemic is not over and segments of the public remain vulnerable (e.g. children under the age of 12 years, persons with specific underlying health conditions and unvaccinated individuals). As oral health providers, we remain diligent in applying infection prevention and control practices based on the premise that everyone is potentially infective (as had been the case prior to the pandemic).

Oral healthcare workers consistently use professional judgment to make informed decisions about the care they provide based on their specific practice setting and other factors including community risk, facility characteristics, and patient demographics.

As such, our team is reminded to maintain new procedures and promote the continued adoption of improved standards (e.g. patient pre-screening; limiting people in the waiting area; daily screening of providers and staff members; enhanced cleaning and disinfection of non-clinical areas; physical distancing) and habits (e.g. enhanced hand hygiene; staying home when not feeling well) that resulted from the guidelines and may be considered best practice going forward.

One of the key principles of routine practices/standard precautions is the performance of a point-of-care risk assessment of infectious agents since additional precautions above and beyond routine practices/standard precautions that may be necessary.

We request patients who are symptomatic for respiratory disease to reschedule their visit to a healthier date.

While it is a matter of individual privacy and decision-making, our team respects vaccination. We look to each other and our broader community to follow the evolution of public health guidelines.

We are concerned about your medical history; we keep it confidential and seek to understand it well. There are many things we do to plan a reduced-stress visit and/or help with medical needs.

This may include scheduling early morning appointments, prescribing anxiety-reducing medications, and/or communicating directly with your physician and/or pharmacist.

All staff in direct patient contact continue to wear a **surgical/procedural mask**, gloves and scrubs in the treatment-side of the clinic. N95 standardization is not uniformly applied in AHS, hospital, medical, laboratory clinics to date, and is not standard in our current clinic configuration.

However, PPE that may be additionally applied includes N95 masks (when available and on patient request), face-shields/goggles, clinical gowns, pre-procedural mouth rinses for surgical services, the limited use of high-speed handpieces; and the use of high-volume evacuation to control aerosols at the source of production.

The patient experience is enhanced by glass doors, auto-operating HVAC and HEPA filtering systems. Professional cleaners disinfect patient contact surfaces and/or arrival areas on a scheduled/nightly basis. Contactless payment options are also available.

We strive to keep informed of on-going and new public health measures as routine practice. Alberta dentists, registered dental assistants and registered dental hygienists are each governed by their own independent colleges, and as a team we track continuing developments and reference local standards in AHS and hospital protocols, and find consensus in the above strategy for infection control.