



18 March 2020

Dear Registrant

The current COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact across all health services. Dentists' primary obligation now is to ensure their own health, the health and wellbeing of their staff and to protect their patients.

Ireland's national response to COVID-19 is supported by a dedicated governance structure to ensure a public health-led, whole-of-society approach. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) for COVID-19, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, oversees and provides direction, guidance, support and expert advice on the development and implementation of a strategy to respond to COVID-19 in Ireland. The NPHE is supported by an Expert Advisory Group and a number of subgroups. The Taoiseach in his national address on St Patrick's Day emphasised that at all times the Government will be guided by, and take, the expert advice of the NPHE.

NPHE and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) have assessed the particular risks for the dental profession and their patients. Their advice is that there is no current scientific evidence to justify denial of dental care to members of the public who have neither a fever nor respiratory symptoms. Neither is there scientific evidence to support the use of respirator masks for routine dental practice. This is consistent with the advice given to other healthcare professionals who perform aerosol generating procedures on patients without fever or symptoms of respiratory tract infection.

To be clear, at this time, the advice is that dental practices can remain open and that there is currently no need for a change in dental interventions. The exceptions are if a patient reports a symptom of respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath or fever) or if you have any COVID-19 related concerns about a patient, such as their recent travel history. In such cases essential dental care should be considered only after consultation with the patient's GP and/or assigned physician and/or as advised by a public health official. No dental professional is expected to take such a decision without the support of medical colleagues.

The document "Interim guidance for healthcare professionals in relation to the management of individuals with suspected Covid-19 infection presenting to community health care settings other than general practice" was specially developed by the HPSC for dental practices. The HPSC has confirmed that this guidance dated 10th March 2020 remains valid until further notice. The HPSC has highlighted (i) Environmental Cleaning/Disinfection and (ii) Cleaning of communal areas. See weblink www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance.

Responses to key dental queries are attached. I wish to assure you that if there are any changes to the above advice, you will be informed.

Yours faithfully,

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Chief Dental Officer