

Changes in Dentistry from COVID 19

What has changed

Boynton Beach, May 24, 2020 ([IssueWire.com](http://www.IssueWire.com)) - DENTAL STERILIZATION CHANGES SINCE COVID 19

How things may have changed

We have all heard so much recently about the Coronavirus. It's been on the news 24/7, seven days a week since early March. If you're not "COVID-weary", here is an explanation of what dentists now best; infection control in the dental office.

Karen Glerum began her dental career in the 1980s. As a dental student, dentists normally didn't even wear gloves in the dental clinic at Georgetown Dental School in Washington DC. In 1982, dental students and dentists started hearing of a new disease afflicting homosexual men called AIDS. Even before the HIV virus was officially isolated, dentistry responded. New infection control guidelines were introduced, including the donning of gloves and masks for every patient encounter.

Keeping in mind that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a diagnosis of HIV infection was 100% fatal, there was no vaccine and no treatment. It is bloodborne, but if someone got a needle stick at that time, it was considered a fatal accident. Dentists and doctors alike were prohibited from discriminating against any AIDS patients and treated everyone as if they were equally infectious. The term Universal Precautions was adopted from this era.

With the introduction of the antiretroviral treatments for HIV, that virus became a chronic disease rather than a death sentence in most of the world. Dentistry maintained our Universal Precautions and expanded them. There has never been a case of HIV infection from the dental office (where proper infection controls are practiced), except the Dr. David Acer/Kimberly Bergalis case in 1990—which was intentional and made headlines around the world!

As many dentists remember at that time being asked questions like "are you married?" and "do you have children?" Dentists took many patients on a "tour" of their infection control protocols in the office. One patient Dr. Glerum remembers came in with a Mason jar filled with a clear liquid. She said she wanted me to "dip all your instruments in this jar before you put them in my mouth." She said it was bleach. After explaining how we sterilize everything to protect her and the bleach would HARM her, she still insisted. Dr. Glerum then dismissed this patient. Patients were understandably afraid; like the fear that has been propagated today with COVID 19.

Fast forward to today. Our modern dental practice employs many practices to insure patient and team safety. Dental teams along with their dentists wear gloves and Level Three face masks which have a positive facial lock. These masks filter out particles down to one nanometer in size—they are virtually impenetrable. Dental teams wear disposable gowns and cover all surfaces with plastic or sticky film in the treatment rooms. Their instruments, including high and low-speed handpieces, are first cleaned in an ultrasonic cleaner to remove debris. They are then packed into instrument cassettes, wrapped and sterilized in an autoclave; the same heat and pressure sterilization units used in a hospital operating room.

If they can use a disposable item, they do so and throw these away after each use. All our countertops handle, and other surfaces are thoroughly wiped with hospital grade disinfectant. These disinfectants kill

everything, including Coronavirus, tuberculosis, HIV, Staph (and all bacteria), hepatitis A, B, C; and all other germs that can make you sick.

The dental office uses high-speed suction during treatment, which minimizes aerosols. Many also use a great new device called an Isolite which suctions out excess fluids, protects your delicate gums and tongue, and reduces aerosols at the same time.

Keep in mind that dentistry has a PERFECT track record of NOT transmitting diseases. In medicine, on the other hand, there are approximately 1.7 million non-fatal hospital-acquired infections in the US each year, and almost 100,000 fatalities! (Data from CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/data/index.html>).

Avoiding dental treatment due to fear of infection or any other fear is very risky behavior. Dental and gum infections are very common, and many times have no symptoms until the very end stages. Dental diseases cause a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke and premature birth of infants. This is due to INFLAMMATION—the root cause of many human ailments. Having a healthy body means having a healthy mouth—you can't have one without the other!

Rest assured, those in dentistry have always had your health and well-being at the forefront of everything they do. Going to the dentist can be nerve-racking for some, but in most practices, they will keep you calm as well as safe. Talk to them about your anxieties, whatever the cause. Once discussed, they are much easier to tackle, and most patients find they are happy they came!

Dr. Glerum both works and lives in the Boynton Beach, Florida area. She is the proud Mom of two daughters. In her spare time, Dr. Glerum enjoys reading, cooking, working out, travel, and most of all being a Mom! After all, motherhood and dentistry are very closely related; both require patience, knowledge, and compassion. She is proud to be a woman dentist in Boynton Beach, Florida.

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Source : <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/data/index.html>

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