

## COVID-19: Suspension of Oral Health Services in BC (COVID-19 Update) Frequently Asked Questions

March 19, 2:12pm

This information will be amended and adapted regularly as the situation changes.

COVID-19 has become a serious global pandemic and is having significant impacts throughout the world, including here in British Columbia. We recognize that many dental hygienists in the province are concerned

BCDHA has put together this FAQ to support members who have concerns or questions about this situation. If you have an additional question, please email it to [info@bcdha.com](mailto:info@bcdha.com) labelled Service Suspension and we will post the answer in this document.

**1) The notice says this is just a recommendation. Do we have to suspend services?**

In British Columbia, the regulatory colleges are limited when it comes to their ability to shut down businesses or order mandatory shutdowns. For this reason, the two colleges have issued recommendations that all oral health providers suspend services, aside from those that are emergent. We strongly advise all dental hygienists to remember they are accountable to the College of Dental Hygienists of BC.

**2) Other health professions continue to work. If we have no symptoms, why are oral health services being suspended?**

This is a recommendation from public health. As you are likely aware, government has requested that all Canadians practice social distancing, which includes ensuring there is a metre between yourself and another individual. Oral health services are not possible with this separation.

**3) What if my employer says we are not stopping work?**

We know that some employers have stated that they will continue to work, despite these recommendations from the Colleges. Please Note, the Colleges cannot FORCE dental offices to close as that is a legal issue. However, BCDHA strongly encourages all members to

carefully consider the recommendations of the CDHBC and take the appropriate steps to follow these recommendations. If your employer is demanding that you work when you have indicated that you do not believe it is safe for yourself or your patients, does not allow for appropriate social distancing and is against the recommendations of your regulatory body, there are a few steps you can take:

- 1) Discuss your concerns with your employer – ask if they have read the emails from the CDSBC and CDHBC that clearly indicate the Colleges wishes that non-emergent services be suspended.
- 2) If you continue to experience resistance, you may want to call the CDSBC, not to issue a complaint, but rather to seek their advice and mediation regarding how to move forward.
- 3) Ultimately, you need to make the decision for yourself, but BCDHA strongly encourages dental hygienists to consider suspending services (unless you are required to assist the dentist with an emergency). This can be difficult when under pressure, but your responsibility and accountability as a dental hygienist is to your patients and to CDHBC.

The Provincial Health Officer (Dr. Bonnie Henry), has the authority to mandate a stoppage of all but non-emergent oral health services. BCDHA is advocating to government that they take this step and remove all uncertainty. Please follow this page for further information.

**4) How long will this suspension last?**

Unfortunately, we have no idea how long the current pandemic, and the subsequent society changes will continue. We certainly hope this is the worst we will see, but we believe all dental hygienists need to be prepared for a long-term suspension of services. Please follow our FAQ on EI and Income Assistance as we gather more information on how dental hygienists can take advantage of the programs and services that government will be providing to offer financial relief.

**5) Will I lose my job?**

Government is providing assurance that individuals will not lose their job. We encourage you to speak with your employer about their particular situation, as we recognize that offices that are closed continue to accrue overhead expenses. Our hope is that government will provide assistance to ensure no permanent closures result.

**6) Will CDHBC and BCDHA continue to work during this time?**

Both the college and the professional association will continue to work throughout this period. Please note that both offices are currently closed as we respect the directive to engage in social distancing and provide work-from-home options wherever possible. BCDHA will be focusing on supporting members through this time, and we want to hear from you if there are additional questions or concerns we have not addressed through our social media, FAQs and website.

**7) What if a patient has an emergency?**

Your office should have protocols in place during this period to respond to urgent oral health issues. Check with your employer. It would be unlikely that a patient would have an urgent dental hygiene issue.

**8) If my employer won't close the office and lay us all off, can I just not show up? I don't think I should work but I'm afraid I can't qualify for EI?**

We understand that many dental hygienists are in a scary spot with office closures that may last for a while, depending on how this pandemic evolves. We don't have all the answers yet, although we are assured that everyone will be taken care of and there will be programs that support every Canadian. We have put together a [FAQ on EI and Income Assistance](#) and will update it regularly as more information becomes available.

All oral health providers are being asked to suspend all but emergent services by their College. We expect that in the next few days, it will become harder and harder to book appointments as British Columbians self-isolate more routinely. We also know that CDSBC and BCDA are continuing to notify members that at this point, all non-emergent dental services should be suspended.

The Provincial Health Officer (Dr. Bonnie Henry), has the authority to mandate a stoppage of all but non-emergent oral health services. BCDHA is advocating to government that it take this step and remove all uncertainty. If government does this, there will no longer be an option for your employer to pressure you to continue work.

[CDHBC Announcement on Suspension of Dental Hygiene Services](#)

[CDSBC Announcement on Suspension of Dental Services](#)