



## Return to Work for Dental Hygienists in BC

As dental hygienists return to work across the province, BCDHA and CDHA are committed to providing dental hygienists with the support and information they need to make the process as seamless as possible. Return to work began on May 19th, 2020, in British Columbia following the release of the [Return to Non-Essential Care Guidance](#) on Friday, May 15th, 2020 by the College of Dental Hygienists of BC.

According to WorkSafe BC, “Every worker in B.C. has the right to a healthy and safe workplace. Workers have the right to know about the hazards in their workplace, to participate in health and safety activities, and to refuse unsafe work without repercussion.”<sup>i</sup> We understand that every hygienist has a different employment situation and a different experience, and that there are some dental hygienists in the province who are feeling very unsafe with the proposed minimum level of PPE and the enforcement of social distancing within their workplace.

BCDHA hopes and presumes that most employers and employees will have discussed the return to work plan for their office, and that any concerns surrounding safety will have been respectfully and appropriately addressed. Many workplaces have made the decision to move to N95 masking during aerosol treatment for instance, and we applaud their commitment to the health and safety of their staff and clients. It is important for all oral health providers to remember that the return to work guidelines are developed and published by Regulatory Colleges and represent only the minimum standards required in order to protect the public from risk of COVID-19. All workplaces have the right and responsibility to consider higher levels of protection, particularly in situations where staff or patients have indicated a desire for more robust measures.

In response to the guidelines, BCDHA is:

- Actively discussing the guidelines with the oral health colleges, the BC Centre for Disease Control, the BC Dentists Association, and public health. We will continue to seek clarity on some of the information and recommendations that are causing confusion.
- Seeking and receiving input from members about the questions we need to ask, and the areas where further clarity is required.
- Hosting [fireside chats](#) to have open discussions with members, and seeking members input into steps they would like us to take. Please visit the [COVID information page](#) on the BCDHA website to review the list of questions and concerns members have raised to date.
- Establishing direct ‘reporting’ opportunities for dental hygienists who feel they should report non-compliance with the guidelines but need to do so anonymously.
- Developing several FAQs and templates for DHs to help navigate return to work, and to advance discussions with employers.



- Working with an employment lawyer to understand the legal questions dental hygienists have in a range of different employment situations.
- Developing a policy table of members who will develop member-determined standards that the BCDHA and members will then use to advocate for change with employers.

Please fill out this [short survey](#) to help us ensure we can bring forward the issues and concerns of as many members as possible.

We recognize that decision-makers (including the oral health colleges, BC Centre for Disease Control, public health), employers, practitioners and the public are all trying to understand how best to move forward and provide a safe environment during these uncertain times. Guidelines are the responsibility of the regulatory colleges however, and BCDHA and CDHA are not involved in the development of these documents.

In order to support their members, CDHA has provided information related to return to work concerns on their [Returning to Work](#) webpage. Members may also wish to review the [COVID-19 Insurance Coverage Overview](#) video and the [COVID-19 Considerations When Resuming Practice](#) information sheet. A question and answer video with a lawyer specializing in employment law will be released Friday May 22.

The BCDHA and CDHA are committed to ensuring best practices and safety of all members as we return to work, and we will advocate for the benefit of the profession and individual hygienists as we move forward.

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For more information:

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<sup>i</sup> (<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation/what-workers-should-expect?origin=s&returnurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.worksafebc.com%2Fen%2Fsearch%23q%3Dsafe%2520workpla ce%26sort%3Drelevancy%26f%3Alanguage-facet%3D%5BEnglish%5D>)