

Patient Return: What to Expect After COVID-19



Introducing the Patient Return Resource Center

Welcome to the ADA's Patient Return Resource Center — a suite of patient communication tools intended to support you and your dental team in communicating with patients about what to expect and what they will experience when returning for non-emergent care. If desired, these materials also allow for customization throughout so you can tailor specific points to your practice and patients.

This ADA member content is based on the American Dental Association's (ADA's) Return to Work Interim Guidance Toolkit developed by the ADA Advisory Task Force on Dental Practice Recovery.

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Use this step-by-step visual guide to demonstrate to patients what will happen before, during and after their visit. Add your practice name, phone number and email to this editable PDF.
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NEW as of November 19, 2020: As the United States faces a resurgence, you and your dental team may receive questions and hear concerns from patients about whether it is safe to visit the dentist. Use this discussion guide to help work through those conversations.
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Use this comprehensive FAQ to reassure patients with sample responses that address potential patient concerns. These answers can be used during phone calls, in email exchanges or on social media.
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Get 2 different versions of email — complete with areas to communicate your office's specific protocols — to reassure patients of your practice's commitment to maintaining up-to-date infection control procedures.
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Remind your patients about upcoming appointments and let them know about new check-in procedures with this text message copy.

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What to Expect Guide

Reassure patients of your office's commitment to maintaining up-to-date infection control procedures. This customizable flyer can be updated with your dental practice's information and sent to patients.

To customize the template for your dental practice, download a copy of the [What to Expect Guide](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR NEXT DENTAL APPOINTMENT

Dental Practice Name

Phone: 312-440-2500
Email: DentalPractice@email.com

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of things about our day-to-day lives, including dental appointments. Your health and safety are as important to us as they are to you. Every concern you've had, we've had too. As your dentists, we have reviewed all of the expert guidance and research to make sure we're taking every measure to keep patients and staff safe. Here's what you can expect in our office:

BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT



To make sure patients are healthy, our team may call you to ask you some health-related questions before your scheduled visit.



To limit the number of patients in the waiting room, you may be asked to wait outside the office or in your car until the team is ready for you.



You may be asked to limit the number of people you bring with you or allow older children to go into the office without a parent.



Some additional cleaning and sanitation measures will be done after each patient leaves to prepare the space for you.

AT YOUR APPOINTMENT



Many cities and states are asking people to wear face masks in public. You'll be asked to wear one to your appointment as well.



The dental team will take your temperature and may repeat the health questions asked before your appointment.



High-touch items like toys or magazines may be removed from the waiting room.



The dental team may wear additional protective equipment, including face masks, plastic face shields, goggles and surgical gowns.

AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT



If you start to experience symptoms of COVID-19 within 2 days of your appointment, call to alert the office staff so those who came into contact with you may be tested for the disease.



Schedule your next appointment on your way out. Your oral health is connected to your overall health, so one of the many ways you can stay healthy during these times is to keep up with regular dental care. We are here for you.

We want you to feel comfortable when you come in for your appointment. Please reach out to us and we'll be happy to answer any questions you have about our new safety measures. See you soon!



TIP: Use the interactive form fields in the document to customize with your practice's information.



TIP: Send this guide prior to patient appointments.

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Conversation Talking Points to Help Anxious Patients

NEW as of November 19, 2020

As the United States faces a resurgence, you and your dental team may receive additional questions and hear concerns from patients about visiting the dentist. Use this discussion guide to help reassure them that dental visits are safe and taking care of their oral health during this time is essential to their overall health.

Why it is important to maintain dental visits, even during a pandemic.

- Oral health is an important part of overall health.
 - Prevention and treatment of dental disease is important to your overall health.
 - Routine appointments allow us to check for a number of health conditions. Some conditions, like tooth decay, can be more difficult, painful and expensive to treat if not caught early.

Health and safety is first and foremost.

- We understand you are concerned about your health and safety — and we are too! As doctors of oral health, that is always our top priority. We are taking a number of new precautions to protect you in accordance with the American Dental Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The good news is — these precautions are working.
 - An October 2020 report published in [The Journal of the American Dental Association](#) found that 99 percent of dentists were using enhanced infection control procedures such as screening protocols and enhanced disinfection practices when treating patients.
- Our dental team is also carefully monitoring our own health through daily screenings. Our staff takes their temperatures to make sure no one has a fever, and we answer health-related questions each day to make sure no one is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.
 - Researchers from the ADA Science and Research Institute and the ADA Health Policy Institute are continuing to collect infection rate data among dentists and have added dental hygienists to the research as well. The preliminary data suggest the monthly incidence rate among dentists has remained below one percent.

How we are working to limit the spread of COVID-19

- Dentists were infection control experts before the pandemic, and we have strengthened already-strict infection control procedures in accordance with American Dental Association and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to help limit the spread of COVID-19.


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- **Before your appointment, we are taking many precautions to provide safe dental care.**
 - Our office staff may call and ask some questions about your current health status before your visit. They may also repeat these questions when you arrive to make sure nothing has changed.
 - You may have their temperature taken prior to any procedure.
 - You may be asked to bring and wear your own masks when you arrive at our office.
 - You may be asked to limit the number of people you bring to the appointment. That could mean leaving your children at home under proper supervision or allowing your older children to go into the office alone while you wait outside during the appointment.
- **During your visit, you can expect the following:**
 - You may be asked to wait outside until the dental team is ready to see you. This is to reduce the number of people in the office and the time you are around other people.
 - Inside the office, you may notice things like toys and magazines — the things many people tend to touch — have been removed.
 - We will have hand sanitizer available for you to use.
 - Our staff may wipe down items patients often touch like pens, clipboards or furniture.
 - You may notice other changes that allow items to be easily cleaned, such as disposable covers on the computer keyboard in the exam room.
 - Our dental team, including me, may be using different protective equipment than you've seen at previous appointments, such as masks, face shields, gowns and goggles. Don't worry, the same smiling faces are still there underneath!
- **After every visit:**
 - Our team will thoroughly clean the areas where all patients have been, using disinfectants that are effective against the virus that causes COVID-19.

Dental Appointments and COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions


Use these sample responses to help answer common questions you and your office staff may receive from patients by phone, email or social media.

Can I put off my dental appointment until after the COVID-19 pandemic is over?


 Regular dental appointments are an important part of taking care of your overall health. While it can be tempting to put off your regular checkup until things feel more “normal” again, I advise against it. Routine appointments give me an opportunity to check for a number of health conditions and catch them early. Some conditions, like tooth decay, can be more difficult, painful and expensive to treat if they’re left undetected.

Your health and safety is, and has always been, my top priority. My staff and I are taking every precaution to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission at your visit.

What about teledentistry? Can I substitute a virtual visit for my regular appointment?

 A phone or video appointment isn’t the same as your regular appointment. Teledentistry can be helpful in some situations, such as deciding if an oral health issue you’re experiencing is an emergency that requires immediate treatment or if it’s something that can wait a bit. If you think you may be experiencing a dental emergency, call my office and we’ll help you decide if you need to come in.

What are you doing differently because of COVID-19?

 There are a number of science-backed steps my staff and I are taking to help limit the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- **Increased personal protective equipment** including masks, face shields, goggles and surgical gowns or long-sleeved lab coats.
- **Increased cleaning protocols.** This includes using disinfectants known to kill the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, removing high-touch items like magazines and toys from waiting rooms and frequently cleaning items like pens and clipboards.
- **Asking you to change your behavior** by asking you to wait outside rather than in waiting rooms when possible, wearing face masks and not bringing additional people to your appointment.

[Points to consider adding in relation to your office:]

- Detailed instructions on how patients should check in and where they should wait until you are ready for them.
- Information on what happens if the patient forgets or does not wear a mask. Will your office provide one?

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- If a parent is calling to book an appointment for their child, consider offering the following information:
 - Where to wait, especially if they are bringing in more than one child for back-to-back appointments
 - Whether the parent will be allowed in the treatment room with the child
 - Offer advice to parents on how to describe the new PPE you and your team will be wearing in an age appropriate way to their child(ren)
- Customize the visual guide of what to expect at your next appointment with your practice information. Mail or email the file to your patients prior to your visit as a follow up to this conversation.



I've heard it's safer to schedule your appointment for first thing in the morning — the office will be cleaner because there haven't been patients coming through before me. Is that true?



You should schedule your dental appointment for the time of day that works for you. The same enhanced cleaning protocols occur all day long, including leaving the room empty after a patient leaves to allow the appropriate time necessary as part of thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting the space between patients.



How is your dental team monitoring themselves for COVID-19?



Staff at our practice are subject to daily health screenings. This includes taking their temperatures to make sure they don't have a fever and asking them a series of health-related questions each day to make sure they're not experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.



I see you added a charge related to COVID-19 to my bill. What's that for?



The safety of patients and dental staff is my highest priority. Because of the shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE), the cost of (PPE) has increased considerably. Our office is including this charge during the pandemic until supply can meet demand and costs are controlled. If you have a dental benefit plan, it may cover some or all of these charges and the ADA has been advocating for payment from insurance companies across the country. However, the outcome is up to each plan.



You said you cannot see me as a patient because of my COVID-19 risk. Can you do that?



Yes. The safety of our patients and the dental team is our highest priority. As Dentists, we use our professional judgment and guidance from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ADA to determine risk levels for seeing patients. If it was determined that you were high risk, or had a high temperature on the day of your appointment, we can have a conversation about which factors determined delay of service, so that you can self-monitor and reschedule.

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Facebook Posts: New Health and Safety Measures

What to Expect



We know you have questions and concerns about your next dental visit, and we have answers. Here's what to expect when you visit your dentist. We can't wait to see you soon!


MouthHealthy.org/BacktoDentist

 **IMAGE:** [ADA What to Expect 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Take a photo of your team, ready to welcome patients back.

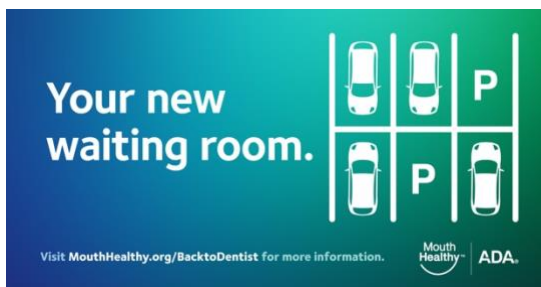
New PPE Protocol




We're still the same smiling dental team under our personal protective equipment. We can't wait to see you soon! Book your next appointment at [\[insert practice website/phone number/email, etc.\]](#).

 **IMAGE:** [ADA All Smiles 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Take a photo of the dentist or dental team with and without PPE. Create a split screen image using a simple photo editor.

Your New Waiting Room



We can't wait to see you, and we kindly ask that you embrace our new "waiting room" that includes the great outdoors or the comforts of your car [\[or insert description of the area outside of your office\]](#) until we call you in for your scheduled appointment time. For more info on post-COVID-19 measures we've implemented for your dental checkup, visit MouthHealthy.org/BacktoDentist.

 **IMAGE:** [ADA Waiting Room 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Take a photo of your parking lot or the area outside of your waiting room where you recommend patients wait to be seen.

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Extra Cleaning and Sanitization

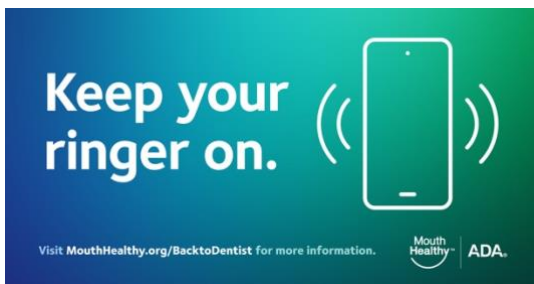


Your comfort and health are our priority. Learn about our additional cleaning and sanitization practices after each patient, in addition to numerous other precautions before, during and after your visit at MouthHealthy.org/BacktoDentist.



IMAGE: [ADA Health and Safety 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Take a photo of a team member prepping a bay for a new patient while using enhanced cleaning protocols.

Ringer On



A key thing to know before you go — charge your phone and have your ringer on! In the moments before your dental visit, we'll call you when it's time to head inside. Reducing the foot traffic and time people spend inside our office is one of the many ways we're working hard to keep you healthy. For more on the steps we're taking, visit MouthHealthy.org/BacktoDentist.

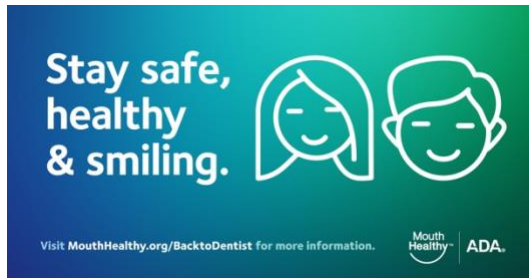


IMAGE: [ADA Ringer On 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Take a photo of a patient (with permission) or office staff member standing in the outside waiting area, ready to take a call. Remember to get a signed release from the patient!

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Facebook Posts: Back to School

Option 1



If you're thinking of skipping your family's back to school dental checkup, reconsider. Check out this list of all the ways we're preparing our office to keep you safe, healthy and smiling.

MouthHealthy.org/BacktoDentist

 **IMAGE:** [ADA Back to School 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Image of visual guide customized with your practice name and information at the top.

Option 2



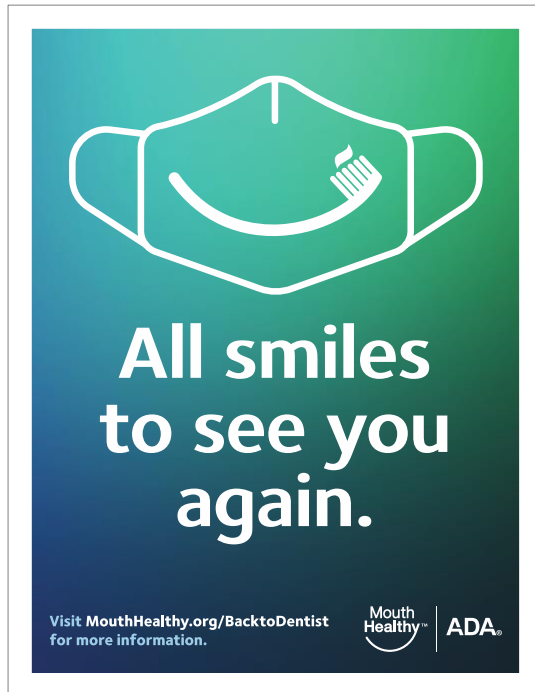
While the school year may look different this fall, the back-to-school list of health requirements should remain a top priority for your family. Book your dental checkup now to be sure to get a convenient time before school starts. Make your next appointment at [\[insert practice website/phone number/email, etc.\]](#).

 **IMAGE:** [ADA Book Back to School Appt 1200x628.jpg](#) (as shown above) or photo suggestion: Write an encouraging back to school message on a chalkboard.

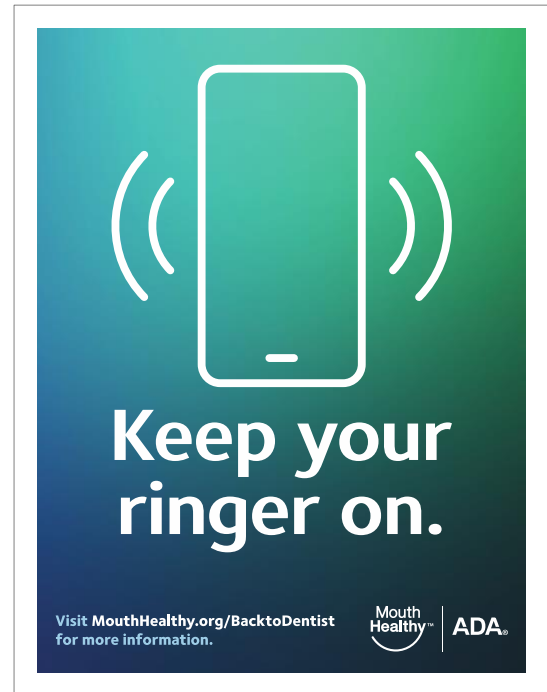
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In-Office Signs

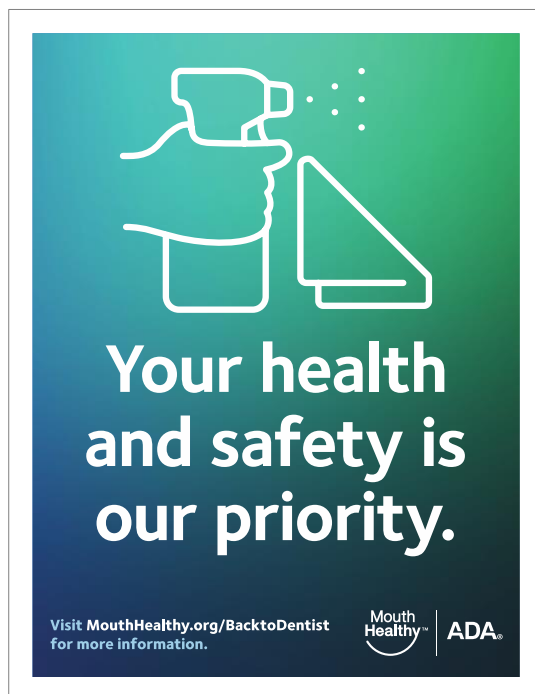
Click on the images or links below to download and print 8.5" x 11" signs to display in your office.



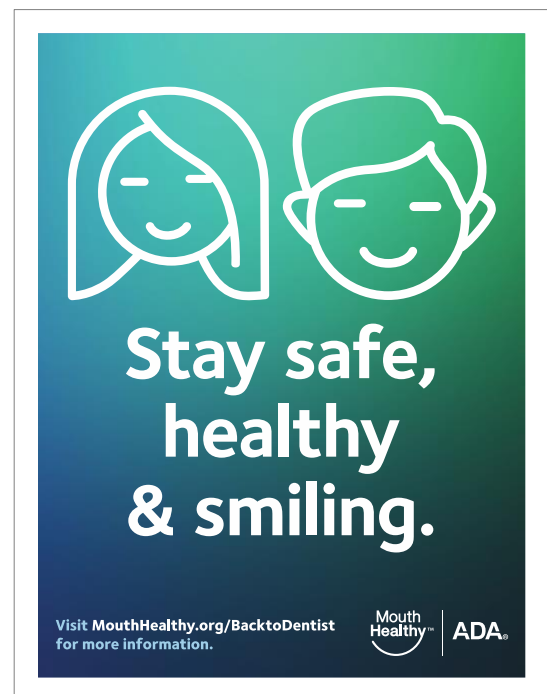
DOWNLOAD: [ADA All Smiles Sign.pdf](#)



DOWNLOAD: [ADA Ringer On Sign.pdf](#)



DOWNLOAD: [ADA Health and Safety Sign.pdf](#)



DOWNLOAD: [ADA Back to School Sign.pdf](#)

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Email: What to Expect at Your Next Appointment

Subject: Your Upcoming Dental Appointment

Pre-header: What you can expect before, during and after your visit

Dear [PatientName],

We can't wait to see you soon. Oral health is a gateway to your overall health, and your health is our top priority. As you might have imagined, things will be a little different this visit. To keep you safe and smiling, our practice is adhering to the American Dental Association's guidance for providing dental care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here's what you can expect:

- Before your appointment
 - We will contact you prior to your visit to check on your current health status
 - You will be asked to limit the number of people you bring to your appointment (this could entail leaving your children at home or having older children go into the office alone)
 - [If a parent is calling to book an appointment for their child, consider offering the following information to help them prepare for the visit and identify any potential barriers that may keep patients from keeping the appointment, such as child care for children who are not being seen that day. Other considerations may include:]
 - [Any age-specific protocols your office has set. (For example, will parents of children under a certain age or with special needs be allowed to stay in the same room during the dental exam?)]
- When you arrive
 - [Specify the number you want the patient to call]
 - [Tell them where to wait to be called back (i.e. in the car, the parking lot)]
- During your appointment
 - For your safety and ours, you'll be asked to wear a mask
 - Your temperature will be taken
 - The dental team will wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE), including face masks, plastic face shields, goggles and surgical gowns or long-sleeved lab coats
- After your appointment
 - To prepare for the next patient, staff will thoroughly clean the areas you've been in using cleansers specifically designed to deactivate the COVID-19 virus
 - [Detail how your team will handle scheduling the next appointment and settle any balances that need to be paid from the day's visit (For example, will the patient complete those steps from their car in the parking lot?)]

All of this is done with your health as our utmost priority. You can rest assured that we are taking every precaution to ensure that our office is optimized for maximum safety. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you have about your visit.

We look forward to seeing you!

Patient Return: What to Expect After COVID-19



Email: Addressing Your Questions

Subject: About Your Upcoming Appointment

Pre-header: Here's what to expect before, during and after your visit

Dear [PatientName],

We can't wait to see you soon. Oral health is a gateway to your overall health, and your health is our top priority. As you might have imagined, things are going to be a little different this visit. Every question you may have had about health and safety during this time of reopening, our dental team has had too.

As your dentist, I've researched and consulted the many scientific resources I have access to as a doctor to address these concerns. To keep you safe and smiling, our practice is adhering to the American Dental Association's guidance for safely providing dental care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before your appointment, we'll contact you to check on your current health status. When you arrive, call [insert phone number] and wait [in this specified area] until we are ready to call you back. The number of people allowed with you will be limited (e.g., older children might have to into the office alone). In the office, may notice that staff are wearing more personal protective equipment (PPE) than you're used to seeing. After your appointment, we will [detail how you will handle scheduling new appointments, taking payment for any services].

All of this is done with your health foremost in our mind. You can rest assured that we are taking every precaution to ensure that our office is optimized for your maximum safety.

We look forward to seeing you!

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Text Reminders

Version 1

Hello [PatientName], your appointment on [insert date/time] is fast approaching. We are taking every step to ensure that our office is optimized for maximum safety before, during and after your visit. Please contact us if you have any questions. We can't wait to see you!



TIP: Remember to have your patients consent to receiving texts from you.

Version 2

Hello [PatientName], we are looking forward to seeing you on [insert date/time]! As one of our new health protocols, please call us from the parking lot when you arrive. We'll start with some questions over the phone, and call you back when it's time to come inside. Contact us if you have any questions.