



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Oral Health Care Services

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, many dental clinics—including those within the Indian health system—have begun adapting their services. While each Tribe can and should make its own decisions on oral health care delivery during this disruptive time, this fact sheet is designed to offer tips and ideas to Tribal dental clinics.

Dental Clinic Recommendations



Because dental health care services often result in patients' droplets (especially from the mouth) spreading, dental offices and providers are considered very high risk for COVID-19 spread. Because of this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as numerous dental advocacy groups, are [recommending](#) that **dental clinics postpone routine and elective treatments while remaining open for only emergency services**. CDC also recommends that treatment for patients showing symptoms related to COVID-19 be

postponed, and that providers remain at home if they feel sick. Dental facilities run by the Indian Health Service and most Tribes are implementing these recommendations. For those clinics that will see patients, **dental clinics should ensure providers have masks on whenever working with a patient and that respirators are available if needed**. Dental staff should also take extra steps to thoroughly disinfect every surface between patient visits.

Dentists and Tribal leaders looking for ways to assist community members might consider providing toothbrushes and toothpaste if possible, perhaps in conjunction with Tribal food distribution services. All community members should be reminded that their teeth need to be brushed and flossed regularly – even during the pandemic.

Teledentistry

While dental care may be disrupted, providers able to offer teledentistry services may find the tool to be very helpful. In particular, teledentistry can assist with:

- Examining patients to determine if care is urgently needed
- Providing diagnosis and a virtual treatment plan for less complex cases

Dental staff might also use other existing tele-communications systems to work with Tribal schools or other programs to remind people of the importance of oral health routines, especially in disrupted times.

Preparing for the New Normal

At some point, dental clinics will resume typical operations. At that time, it is very possible that pent up demand for dental services may cause longer than normal wait times. Clinics should think ahead about what tools can be used to reduce patient no-shows, such as reminder calls. Clinics with dental therapists and dental hygienists should also ensure each provider is able to work at the top of her scope to ensure the clinic is running efficiently.

Disclaimer:
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