

27 March 2020

Dental Council COVID-19 update for oral health practitioners

Every health professional is being asked to play an important front-line role to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and provide essential health services. We know this is a stressful time for all our oral health practitioners, especially as you are being asked to make unprecedented changes to the way you run your practice.

Over the last weeks, the COVID-19 response has been constantly evolving and changing. During this challenging time, we have been liaising with the Ministry of Health, professional associations and other regulators to provide practitioners with certainty and guidance wherever possible.

Gathering and understanding new information has been challenging for us all as the COVID-19 situation is constantly developing and raising new issues to consider. We are working with our international partners and looking at what advice we can provide to all.

We are working differently

We are all adjusting the way we work and live in this unfamiliar situation. Being at [COVID-19 Alert level 4](#) is a new experience for everyone. As a Council we understand this is not a time where business operates as usual.

Dental practices should now be operating in a very different way. This means you should not be providing any non-essential and elective dental treatment. However, practitioners should still provide care to their patients by providing a telephone contact service and triaging patient needs. Practitioners will only need to open their practice when required to provide emergency treatment or urgent care. This service could be done locally or regionally amongst practices or services.

Our Secretariat team is now working remotely from their homes. Please be patient if you experience delays to our usual services during this time - we are doing our very best to support you.

We will be updating our information and responding to your queries as best we can. We also urge you to regularly review [our website](#) and also the [government](#) and [Ministry of Health](#) websites for the latest updates.

Guidelines for emergency dental treatment during COVID-19 alert Level 4

We are now at [COVID-19 alert Level 4](#). The purpose of escalation to Level 4 is to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout New Zealand. Only businesses that provide essential services are permitted to remain open during this time.

The Ministry updated its list of [essential services](#) on 25 March to include emergency dental care. We have received clear advice from the Ministry of Health that dental treatment for urgent care or emergencies which cannot be deferred may continue to be provided during the Level 4 alert period, subject to availability of specified PPE and facilities.

The Ministry and Council issued [joint guidelines on providing urgent and emergency care](#) on 25 March 2020.

These guidelines have been updated and **may be updated further in the coming weeks**. The most recent version is on our website and is clearly dated **26 March 2020**. You should access the guidelines by clicking the link in the *Updates* section located in the top right corner of our home page. This will provide you with the latest version.

Please access the guidelines from our [website](#) each time you need them from the *Updates* page to ensure you have the latest version.

Please note the key changes that have been made to the guidelines since they were issued on 25 March 2020:

- Patients that have recovered from COVID-19 have been removed from the medium and high-risk groups.
- Long sleeve gowns for low risk care is not necessary if not available. Long sleeve, impervious gowns are still required for medium and high-risk care.
- The diagram on page 5 for medium risk care has been updated so the patient criteria match the management processes.

Can you help?

The Ministry of Health is looking for health professionals who are able and willing to work for a limited amount of time as part of the national strategic approach to managing COVID-19. If you think you may be able to help, you can register your interest with the Ministry of Health [here](#).

Annual practising certificates (APCs)

Many oral health practitioners are currently applying for APCs required to practise between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Some practitioners have contacted us as they are unsure whether they should be renewing their APC at a time when their practice is closed.

Although times are uncertain, a current APC will still be a legal requirement to the profession in respect of which you are registered. If you are intending to provide oral health services, then you will need to hold a current APC.

We understand that deciding whether to renew your APC may be stressful for some practitioners at this time. Council will waive the additional processing/late fee which applies after 1 April 2020 if you decide to defer applying or completing your 2020/21 APC application immediately.

You should talk to your employer and refer to the [COVID-19 website](#) for information about support if you are experiencing financial difficulty at this time.

Recertification

Recognising that meeting CPD requirements over the next few months will be difficult for many practitioners, the Council has decided to suspend the [current recertification programme](#) that ends on 31 December 2020. This means practitioners are not required to complete CPD and contact peer activities for the time being.

Given the importance of maintaining your competence when normal business resumes, we encourage all practitioners to complete any professional development that is possible for you during this lock down period, such as online reading and learning, journals etc.

Working together

We all have a role to play and we are all in this together. Along with the rest of New Zealand, we are adjusting and learning as we do our best to meet the government's directions and work together to stop the spread of COVID-19.

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