

VISITING THE DENTIST **IN THE TIME OF COVID-19**

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**IS IT SAFE
TO VISIT THE
DENTIST DURING
THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC?**



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There is an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 if you remove your mask when being in a crowded area, when you're eating out, or even when receiving treatment at the dentist. That said, the additional risk associated with dental visits are only a fraction

higher than being in a restaurant or crowded area.

Most modern clinics are equipped with hospital-grade sterilization equipment and powerful suction systems to reduce the risk of inhalation of water droplets from the

dental drill. This also greatly reduces the risk of any disease transmission.

In fact, most dental clinics have already been equipped with all these, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, according to the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, despite the potential risk of transmission, there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 transmitted in a dental office so far.



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Dentists are highly trained in carrying out preventive measures against all kinds of infectious diseases, even before the COVID-19 outbreak.

We follow guidelines set by the Ministry of Health and the Malaysian Dental Council. At this point of publication, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection, the guidelines recommend to prioritise emergency treatments. Elective and routine procedures may be carried out, balancing the potential risk of COVID-19 infection vs delaying what could have been a simple treatment to becoming bigger problems (such as severe pain, swelling, gum disease, extraction).

To limit and reduce the potential number of interactions of each patient, we practice appointment-based treatments, seeing fewer patients and, where applicable, encouraging patients to come alone. The waiting room set up is also different than pre-COVID-19, to encourage social distancing.

Stringent infection control measures like the mandatory use of face masks, daily screening of temperature and questionnaire for all staff and patients, adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for every member of the dental team (receptionists, dental nurse, clinician

and cleaners), training on the proper method of wearing, removing and disposing of contaminated PPE, thorough disinfection protocol and hand hygiene (washing with soap and water or readily available alcohol-based hand sanitisers) are practiced.

A 1% hydrogen peroxide pre-procedural mouth rinse is mandatory for all patients to reduce the microbial load.

Procedural tweaks like increased usage of rubber dam (a rubber protective sheet over the mouth to retain saliva in the patient's mouth) and high volume suction are to greatly reduce the splatter and spread of

microbial-laced saliva.

A part of the disinfection protocol includes time for aerosols generated from a patient to settle, before the next patient enters the treatment room, reducing risk of inhaling potential COVID-19 virus of the next patient. Cashless payment is also encouraged.

So far, there are no reports of COVID-19 transmission from a dental clinic to a patient. However, if a patient is concerned, they may call their clinic to inquire regarding their dental issue, whether they can delay their dental visit or how soon to schedule their next appointment.

If you have a health-related query, drop us a note at teckchoon.lim@mims.com and we'll get an answer from a qualified expert. Note that the responses in this column are for informative purposes only and should not be considered medical advice—always consult a qualified healthcare professional for appropriate diagnosis and treatment.