

Dental practices rebound as U.S. dentists look forward to COVID vaccine

January 21 2021, by Ernie Mundell



The coronavirus pandemic hit dental practices hard early in 2020, as

COVID-19 fears kept millions of Americans from seeking routine oral health care.

But as dental offices have ratcheted up their [safety measures](#), more patients have steadily been returning for checkups and more, according to recent polls conducted by the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute (HPI).

In fact, by Dec. 14 the average patient volume at U.S. dental offices had resurged to 78% of pre-coronavirus levels according to the poll, which involved 2,700 dentists nationwide.

One such [dentist](#) agreed that his industry—and patients—have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Health economists in the U.S. often use the dental industry as an indicator of the country's economic health, and dental workers accounted for over one-third of the health care jobs lost in the U.S. during the COVID pandemic," noted Dr. David Hirsch. He's [senior vice president](#) and chair of dental medicine at Northwell Health in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

"Many individuals have delayed important dental care or avoided the dentist because of their own fears about contracting the virus in the dental office," Hirsch said, and the consequences could be dire. "This means serious and life-threatening diseases like oral cancers may go undetected," he noted.

Dentists and dental hygienists had justifiable fears of catching the new coronavirus.

"Dentistry is one of the highest-risk professions for coronavirus exposure, since our work is primarily focused inside patients' mouths

and many of our procedures generate aerosols, which are a primary source of coronavirus transmission," Hirsch explained.

In addition, "about half of the current dental workforce is at or near retirement age, which puts them at increased risk for COVID-19 complications," he said.

But hope is in sight as dentists are being included in the first wave of recipients for COVID-19 vaccines. Most dentists are eager to roll up their sleeves.

According to a news release from the American Dental Association, the HPI poll found that "64% of dentists said it is extremely important to get vaccinated, and another 20% answered it is very important. In addition, the majority believe they should get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine is available to them. Older dentists, dentists in large group practices, and specialists find vaccination to be particularly important."

All of this should get Americans back to tending to their oral health, Hirsch said.

Added to office safety protocols already in place, "getting vaccines to all dental providers will increase doctors' and patients' confidence in returning to their usual routines," he said.

Some dental offices are even joining in the vaccination effort by administering shots to qualified patients. For example, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced in early January that dentists would be added to the list of [health](#) care professionals eligible to dispense the vaccine.

"All hands on deck—the more we can administer this vaccine, the better," Dr. Judee Tippet-Whyte, the president of the California Dental

Association, told *ABC News*.

More information: Find out more about COVID-19 safety measures in place at dental offices at the [American Dental Association](#).

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