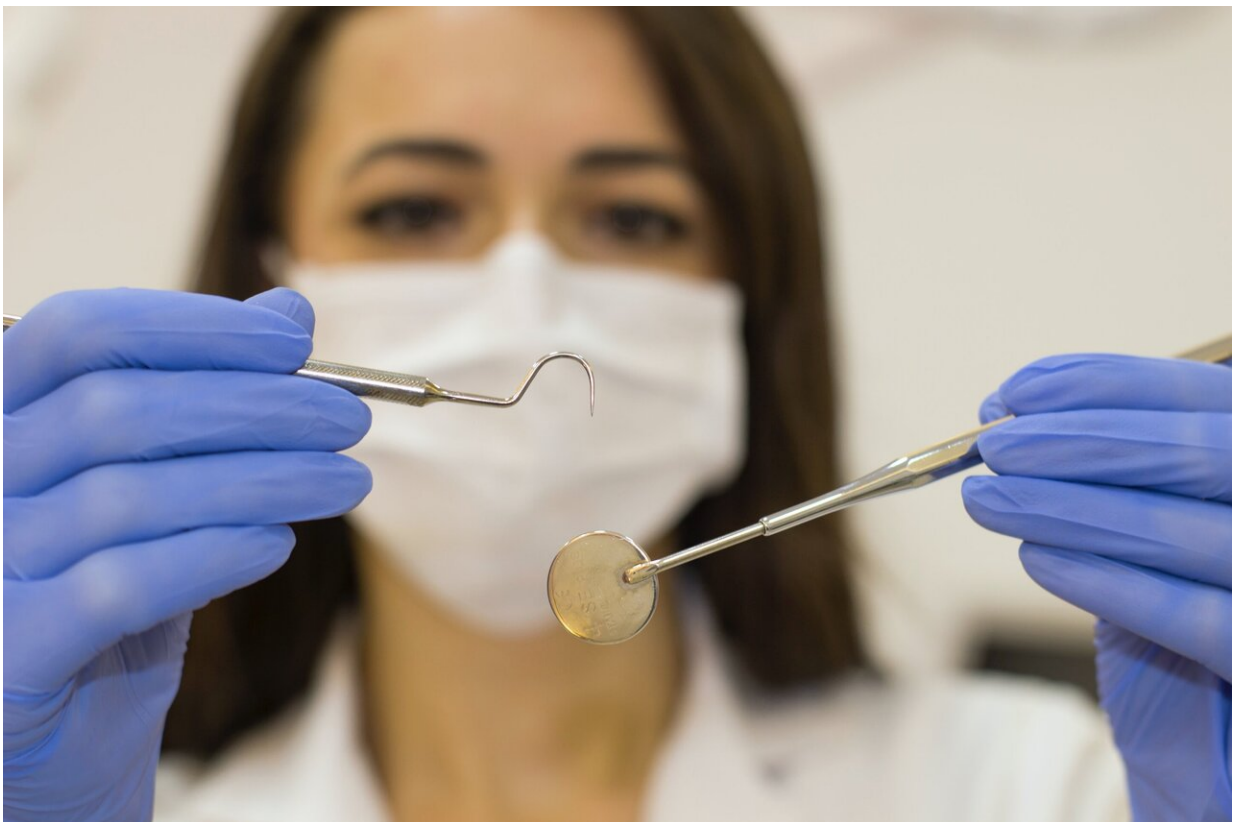


# Dentists and dental hygienists on early front lines of COVID-19 report symptoms of anxiety, depression

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The first known U.S. study to evaluate the mental health of frontline dentists and dental hygienists during the pandemic found that dental

health care workers report anxiety and depression symptoms during peaks of transmission among the public.

Published jointly in the August issues of *The Journal of the American Dental Association* and the *Journal of Dental Hygiene*, the study indicates between June 2020 and June 2021, 17.7% of dental [health](#) care workers reported anxiety symptoms, 10.7% reported [depression symptoms](#), and 8.3% reported symptoms of both. The one-year study conducted from June 2020 to June 2021, included 8,902 dental health care workers participating monthly in an anonymous longitudinal, web-based survey.

According to the findings, between June 2020 and June 2021, dental hygienists reported higher rates of depression symptoms than dentists at each surveyed time point, with depression [symptom](#) rates peaking in December 2020. Dental hygienists' depression rates declined in 2021 as dentists' rates of depression symptoms remained steady. At the end of the study period, both groups had relatively similar rates—11.8% for dentists and 12.4% for hygienists.

"Interestingly, dental health care workers reported lower rates of anxiety and depression symptoms than the [general public](#), despite being on the front lines and providing [oral health care](#) during the pandemic," says author Stacey Dershewitz, J.D., Psy.D., Adjunct Professor of Clinical Psychology and Director of the Center Clinic at the George Washington University Professional Psychology Program. "As the pandemic continues, it is critically important that dental health care workers continue to develop their ability to recognize and address signs and symptoms of [mental health](#) conditions within themselves and their colleagues, promote healthy work environments, reduce the impact of stress on the profession, and make supports accessible to those who are struggling emotionally."

Some participants' anxiety symptoms decreased after receiving the

COVID-19 vaccine. The study—also the first to examine the association between the COVID-19 vaccine and mental health—found that unvaccinated dental health care workers who intended to be vaccinated suffered significantly more [anxiety symptoms](#) (20.6%) compared to fully-vaccinated dental health care workers (14.1%).

"The hope is that this is just the first of many steps in monitoring mental wellness of the entire oral care team," says JoAnn Gurenlian, R.D.H, M.S., Ph.D, A.F.A.A.O.M., Director of Education and Research, American Dental Hygienists' Association. "There is much work to be done to dismantle barriers to treatment and prioritize well-being in the oral care setting, as well as look at future research around contributing factors to [mental illness](#) that may be unique to these professions."

The study is part of ongoing collaborative research efforts between the American Dental Association (ADA) and the American Dental Hygienists' Associations (ADHA) to understand COVID-19's impact on dental health care workers.

"As members of the dental profession, we are committed to improving the oral health of our patients and communities. Furthermore, as [healthcare professionals](#), we must be committed to our own health and wellness to optimally care for others," says study author Maria L. Geisinger, D.D.S, M.S., Professor and Director of the Advanced Education Program in Periodontology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry. "Creating professional environments that allow for open communication about mental health among members of the dental team can reduce the stigma around mental health diagnoses and treatment for dental health care workers."

**More information:** Laura A. Eldridge et al, US dental health care workers' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Journal of the American Dental Association* (2022). [DOI:](#)

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