



## **COVID-19 Update for CDHA members** **March 16, 2020**

Dear member

CDHA has been in discussion with various government departments and stakeholders in support of serious concerns and growing questions regarding the evolving context of dental hygiene services during the COVID-19 outbreak. Throughout the day, we have been engaged with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Dental Assistants Association, legal representatives, insurance representatives, and others.

Highlights from today's discussions are provided below. There will continue to be many unanswered questions until the relevant federal and provincial authorities set out further statements and measures.

Be assured that CDHA is on full alert for any new details and will post updates across our channels (website, email, and social media) as they become available.

The strong recommendation is that all non-essential and elective dental services should be suspended immediately, and that emergency treatment should continue, but only with strict compliance to infection prevention and control guidelines, which cannot be compromised. Dental hygienists should be able to redirect patients/clients for emergency dental care.

- **Provincial public health coordination and decision making**

In our communication with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), we heard that chief provincial public health officers and Canada's chief public health officer are working closely on a pan-Canadian response to the pandemic. In PHAC's advice to CDHA, provincial dental hygiene associations and dental hygienists are

strongly encouraged to work with their provincial/territorial governments as they determine specific measures and responses for their jurisdictions.

As oral health professionals, dental hygienists should bring immediate needs or challenges related to personal protective equipment shortages and ability to work in a safe environment forward to provincial/territorial government public health offices and dental hygiene regulators.

- **Occupational health and safety (including shortages of personal protective equipment)**

Members have told us about practices with limited or inadequate personal protective equipment and about being asked to wear one mask for the day. Compliance with infection prevention and control guidelines cannot be compromised. Provincial legislation requires employers to make the workplace safe for patients/clients and employees. Employees have the right to refuse to work on a reasonable standard in accordance with provincial public health and dental hygiene directives and applicable occupational health and safety legislation. Immunocompromised members or others who are potentially more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 must make a decision that reflects their unique situation based on their professional judgment, and with consideration to the advice of public health experts and the best evidence available at the time.

CDHA is also seeking to understand what the provincial/territorial and rural capacities are for personal protective equipment.

- **Eligibility for employment insurance benefits**

We anticipate that a series of federal and provincial directives will be set out today and in the coming days. In our letter to government dated March 15, 2020, CDHA appealed for all regulated dental hygienists to have access to income replacement supports when they are unable to provide services. We sent an additional letter on March

16 about the need to revise eligibility for EI for dental hygienists who are pregnant and will not be able to work the required hours to qualify for EI maternity benefits. New initiatives have been announced today by both the Ontario and Alberta governments concerning job security as it relates to COVID-19 but that legislation is not, as of yet, in force. We will continue to monitor progress of those initiatives and update our communications accordingly.

We recognize that employment benefits for independent contractors and those who do not qualify for employment insurance will be severely affected. We are committed to raising these concerns on your behalf.

- **Employment implications**

We recognize that there are differences across the country in terms of messaging from provincial public health authorities and provincial regulators as each responds to the outbreak within their jurisdictions. It is particularly important to pay attention to your local and provincial public health authorities.

There may be specific employment law implications for you arising from COVID-19. You are advised to consult a local employment law practitioner. CDHA's pro bono line through Gowling WLG can address your professional liability questions. You may also contact the practice advisor of the regulatory college in your province to address practice related issues.

- **Professional liability & business insurance for members**

Our member insurance program broker, BMS, is handling a number of inquiries regarding income loss under the business interruption portion of property insurance policies purchased by members. BMS is currently investigating if there is coverage in this instance. BMS will be formally communicating more broadly along with other information associated with your professional liability coverage. BMS is ready to

address your questions via email at [cdha.insurance@bmsgroup.com](mailto:cdha.insurance@bmsgroup.com) or by telephone at 1-855-318-6557.

- **Practice questions**

Should you have any questions or requests for clarification concerning content in CDHA's resources, please contact members of CDHA's dental hygiene practice team at [info@cdha.ca](mailto:info@cdha.ca). They will respond as soon as possible. Your patience is appreciated. You may also wish to see what other dental hygienists are sharing through CDHA's social media.

We also recommend that you consult your [provincial/territorial regulator](#) and provincial ministry of health for their latest guidance to health care workers.

- **Links to research and evidence**

CDHA is working to update our website with links to research on related topics. Check back on a regular basis.

- **Support from CDHA office staff**

CDHA staff have been working remotely since Friday, March 13. We are prepared and want to assure you that we are a fully functional "virtual" office. We will continue to be as responsive as always. However, given the increased volume of calls and email communications from members, there may be a delay in our response. We ask for your continued patience as we work diligently to obtain the answers to your questions, and we encourage you to keep an eye on your email and CDHA's website or social media sites for regular updates.

**Please be well and take care of yourselves in this difficult time.**