

### **Guidance for Dental Practices in Malta - COVID-19**

In view of the highly infective nature of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), currently causing the COVID-19 outbreak and the fact that it is transmitted through direct or indirect contact with droplets and contaminated objects, the following guidance, based on available evidence, is being advised for dental practices.

This guidance needs to be referred to and applied in addition to all the other recommended good practices to protect from and safeguard against the spread of this viral infection.

#### **Before Treatment**

- Limit dental procedures to emergency cases and postpone non-urgent appointments and treatment.
- Walk-ins should be strongly discouraged.
- Limit dental procedures to ones that do not create aerosols and airborne particles.
- Patients should be contacted over the phone and questioned **prior** to attending the dental clinic, regarding any medical symptoms (particularly fever, cough, shortness of breath) and dental symptoms, recent travel history and history of possible contact with COVID-19. If they have been abroad in the last 14 days or in contact with known positive persons or have medical symptoms as outlined above and the dental complaints are deemed to be non-urgent, postpone the appointment and/or treatment and instruct patient to contact helpline in 111.
- If treatment is required, **on arrival** at the practice, clients should be screened using a forehead thermometer, instructed to use alcohol hand rub and staff should double check their risk for COVID-19 infection before being admitted into the clinical area. The questions should confirm once again whether over the previous 14 days clients have:
  - been abroad,
  - been in contact with anyone who has been abroad,
  - been in contact with anyone who has had any acute respiratory symptoms,
  - been in contact with anyone who has developed COVID-19
  - themselves had any symptoms of coughing/fever/shortness of breath during the past fortnight.
- Keep a distance of at least 1 metre from the patient while asking the above question and do not stand directly in front of them. Keep this encounter as brief as possible not longer than 5 minutes.
- If the answer/s to any of these questions is 'yes', send the patient back home and instruct him/her to call 111 immediately. The purpose of the call is to ascertain through professional public health screening that the person is COVID-19 negative so that urgent treatment may proceed safely.

**If the patient is negative for all the above criteria (or COVID-19 negative following public health screening), the patient can be deemed safe for management at the dental practice:**

- Clinicians should wear PPE which includes disposable surgical masks, protective eyewear/ face-shields and disposable gloves. These should be changed as per standard practice.
- Practise four-handed dentistry (accompanied by a dental assistant also wearing PPE as outlined above) in a well-ventilated room.
- Dentists and dental assistants should wash their hands well before and after all clinical procedures for 20 seconds in line with the illustration below:



- If the use of handpieces is absolutely necessary (e.g. for an extirpation), the patient should be given a 1% hydrogen peroxide or 0.2% povidone rinse prior to treatment. Treatment should then be carried out under a rubber dam and using high volume suction
- Hand-pieces used should be anti-retraction handpieces. Normal handpieces with no anti-retraction valves can cause cross-infection by aspirating droplets into the dental unit water lines.
- Hand-instruments should be used whenever possible to decrease airborne droplets (e.g. for excavation of gross caries, periodontal abscesses etc).
- If necessary and where possible, extra-oral radiography is recommended in preference to intra-oral radiography.

#### After treatment

- It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to a few days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).
- Surfaces must be thoroughly disinfected before and after each procedure or patient contact. Surfaces include all clinic zones, including computer keyboard and mouse, cupboards and tops, door handles etc.
- All instruments should be sterilised according to standard protocol before and after every patient use.
- Medical waste should be disposed of appropriately in the designated waste disposal and storage facilities. The patient appointments should be well spread out to allow for adequate time (20-30mins) to effectively disinfect all clinical areas, dispose of waste safely and sterilize all used instruments, and avoid cross infection between patients in waiting rooms.

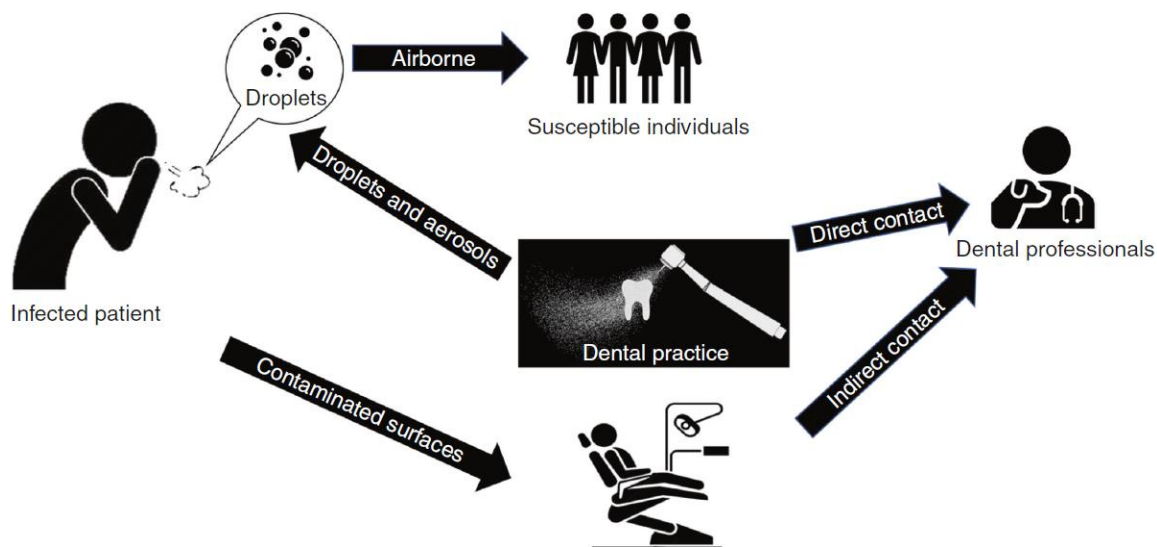


Fig. 1 Illustration of transmission routes of 2019-nCoV in dental clinics and hospitals

Figure 1 Source: Peng et al. 2020

### Being responsible for the dental team

- All members of the dental team are responsible for each other's wellbeing in a dental practice. Clearly define tasks and support each other to ensure that duties are carried out safely and responsibly.
- Screen all staff for fever and/or other Coronavirus symptoms prior to entry into the dental practice. Symptomatic staff should not come in to work.
- Ensure that all staff adheres to quarantine recommendations where applicable.
- Be mindful of other workers that support a dental practice like dental technologists, practice housekeepers and technical staff who maintain dental practice equipment and premises.  
`Disinfect all clinical areas prior to their arrival.

### Emergency dental treatment on a COVID-19 positive patient or contact:

If a patient who tested positive for COVID-19, or a contact of a positive patient, or a symptomatic patient who fits the case definition:

- 1) Assess the patient over the phone
- 2) Advise patient over the phone and send an electronic prescription if required
- 3) If possible, postpone the treatment until the patient recovers. Prescribe medication as necessary
- 4) If patient needs to be seen, wear FULL PPE (FP3 mask, gown, gloves, cap and visor)

(Inform Patient that he/she needs to inform relevant authorities undergoing quarantine of necessity to seek treatment and send an email to [quarantine.covid19@gov.mt](mailto:quarantine.covid19@gov.mt))

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- 5) Disinfect all the clinical areas with Sodium Hypochlorite. This process will probably take up to two hours.
- 6) If in doubt (and as a last resort), refer patients to dental department at Mater Dei Hospital/Gozo General Hospital (8am to 2pm daily) **following** discussion of clinical case with appropriate consultant or senior clinical staff in relevant department and hospital.



**If the patient needs to be seen in his/her residence, instruct the patient to prepare a chair and wait as close to the residence entrance as possible. Approach the patient in FULL PPE (donning OUTSIDE the residence) staying as close as possible to the exit and keeping the door open for ventilation.**

**After examination/treatment, move out of the residence, ask the patient to close the door and doff the PPE according to the protocol:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14WV3ZZurArwkevxfR1XjzO0Q-tVwV5I/view>

**DOFF OUTSIDE the residence. Dispose of all the PPE into a medical waste bag and leave it next to the closed door. Instruct the patient to close the bag and take it inside the house to dispose of later.**

**For more information visit [covid19health.gov.mt](https://covid19health.gov.mt)**

## **References**

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2. Meng, L., Hua, F., & Bian, Z. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Emerging and Future Challenges for Dental and Oral Medicine. *Journal of Dental Research*.
3. Novel Coronavirus – English, Ministry for Health, Malta. Available from: [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt)
4. Coronavirus guidance - not just for NHS practices, British Dental Association. Available from: <https://bda.org/news-centre/blog/Pages/Coronavirus-guidance-not-just-for-NHS-practices.aspx>

This guidance was produced by input from the Faculty of Dental Surgery, Dental Public Health Unit , Dental Association of Malta, Mater Dei Hospital, Infectious Disease Unit and the Superintendence of Public Health.