

Summary of Statements Made by Federal Officials Regarding COVID-19 and Oral Health

In a March 17, 2020, White House Coronavirus Task Force press briefing, White House COVID-19 response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx recommended that hospitals and dentists cancel all elective surgeries over the next two weeks in order to free up hospital beds and space. The task force has stated that its recommendations are not mandatory. [Source: [White House Press Briefing](#)]

On March 18, 2020, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released recommendations to conserve personal protective equipment, beds and ventilators and limit the exposure of patients and staff to COVID-19. CMS recommended that all non-essential dental exams and procedures be postponed until further notice. CMS also recommended postponing or canceling non-essential adult elective surgery and medical and surgical procedures, and making case-by-case evaluations on whether a planned surgery should proceed. CMS suggested considering a number of factors, such as the patient's health and age and the urgency of the procedure. CMS also provided examples of surgeries and procedures that would be appropriate to delay and others that would be permissible to continue to perform.

On March 19th, this was further clarified during a press briefing when the CMS Director announced the following: "To aggressively address COVID-19, CMS recognizes that conservation of critical resources such as ventilators and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is essential, as well as limiting exposure of patients and staff to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Attached is guidance to limit non-essential adult elective surgery and medical and surgical procedures, including all dental procedures. These considerations will assist in the management of vital healthcare resources during this public health emergency. Dental procedures use PPE and have one of the highest risks of transmission due to the close proximity of the healthcare provider to the patient. To reduce the risk of spread and to preserve PPE, we are recommending that all non-essential dental exams and procedures be postponed until further notice." [Source: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/31820-cms-adult-elective-surgery-and-procedures-recommendations.pdf>]

On March 20th, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) followed both of the above recommendations to further clarify their previous guidance by recommending that "dental facilities postpone elective procedures, surgeries, and non-urgent dental visits, and prioritize urgent and emergency visits and procedures now and for the coming several weeks."

[Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/statement-COVID.html>]. We are expecting new guidance specific to dental practices and professionals to be issued by the CDC Division of Oral Health in the next few days, but the statement on March 20th made it clear postponing dental procedures applies to all dental patients, not just those patients who have signs or symptoms of respiratory illness as stated in our March 18th guidance.

On March 22nd, the Surgeon General of the U.S., Vice Admiral Jerome Adams, reiterated this call to postpone dental procedures in an interview with USA Today, stating: “As a member of the president’s Coronavirus Task Force — and a practicing physician — I am calling on all hospital systems to heed federal recommendations and cancel or delay nonessential elective procedures in a way that minimizes potential harm to patients. These include dental procedures as well.” He then outlined the reasons that this postponement was needed and emphasized that this is a temporary issue. [Source: [Official Surgeon General Twitter Account](#)]