



Greetings San Diego Officials,

I am the President of the San Diego County Dental Hygienists' Society and a member of your constituency. As we begin to approach the roadmap to reopening our county to our new normal, I would like to state a very real concern for the unmentioned Allied Healthcare workers - *San Diego's Registered Dental Hygienists*. I kindly ask that you take our risk factors into consideration when giving the "green light" to reopen businesses, specifically dental practices, in regards to providing "elective essential care" (dental cleanings). The clinical (direct patient care) team in any dental practice will be facing three specific and very real issues when elective care once again resumes.

The first issue: *inconsistencies related to differing interpretations of our current State and Federal guidelines*. I am aware that we should refer to the current recommendations of CDC, OSHA and professional organizations such as the California Dental Association (CDA)¹ and the American Dental Association (ADA)². The varying interpretations of said recommendations have the potential to exacerbate the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and increase the risk of a community wide spike in cases, leading to further loss of life and/or greater economic loss should elective essential care be reestablished prematurely. *Clear and concise advisement is vital*.

The second issue: *high risk exposure of acquiring and transmitting the novel coronavirus through aerosol sprays*. Aerosol sprays are produced by our dental equipment such as the ultrasonic scaler, air polishing hand-piece, slow-speed hand-piece, and the air/water syringe used during dental hygiene procedures by the dental hygienist (recall your dental hygiene (cleaning) appointment and any "splatter" you felt while your hygienist used these equipment). Despite disinfecting procedures performed between patients, airborne aerosols have the potential to contaminate contact surfaces which may lead to inadvertent infection of other patients as well as the dental hygienist.

The third issue: *the inability to ensure the clinical team has sufficient access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPEs)*. Please keep in mind that these are the same PPEs our frontline healthcare workers need. The most appropriate level of mask for our profession is the N95 mask³. A level 3 surgical mask is the minimum when used in combination with a protective face shield⁴. Please visualize us - we are working in your mouth. We must be protected from large droplets **and** aerosols. The demand for PPEs for our frontline workers makes it difficult for dental supply companies to supply PPEs in a timely manner. It's important to note: dental supply companies were already limiting quantities of specific inventory just prior to our state's stay at home orders. Furthermore, we may be treating many asymptomatic COVID-19 positive patients. Again, our clinician-to-patient distance puts us at HIGH risk for exposure to a heavy load of viral aerosols.

I am confident your team of professionals will make the best decision for our community. I respectfully ask for a strong consideration in protecting the safety and well-being of San Diego's Allied Healthcare Workers: **Dental Hygienists** - our families, and our community when it comes to loosening the current orders and returning us to our new normal.

In Gratitude,


Irish Thomas, BSDH, RDHAP

San Diego County Dental Hygienists' Society President

Reference:

1. [The California Dental Association \(CDA\) Infection Control, Patient Screening and PPE](#)
2. [The American Dental Association \(ADA\) Interim Guidance for Minimizing Risk of COVID-19 Transmission](#)
3. [The American Dental Association \(ADA\) Understanding Mask Types](#)
4. [The U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) N95 Respirators and Surgical Masks \(Face Masks\)](#)