

Is it safe to visit the dentist during the pandemic?

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Illustration by Peter Hamlin

Is it safe to visit the dentist during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dentists can't eliminate all risk, but they are taking steps to minimize the chances of spreading the coronavirus.

You'll likely notice changes as soon as you enter the office. Many dentists have removed magazines from [waiting rooms](#), for example, as well as some chairs to encourage social distancing. They also are spacing out appointments to avoid crowding their offices.

You may be asked to arrive for your appointment with a facial covering and to wait in your car until equipment is cleaned and the [dentist](#) is ready. Before receiving care, you can also expect staff to take your temperature and ask about COVID-19 symptoms.

Procedures are changing, too.

Coronavirus is spread mainly through droplets people spray when they talk, cough or sneeze. Dental care requires close quarters and

procedures that can generate a spray of saliva and water. To reduce risk, dentists are returning to manual tools for procedures like teeth cleanings, instead of other instruments that may do the job faster but create more of that spray.

Staff also have started wearing masks, face shields and other personal protective equipment. Some dentists are charging for all the extra gear, so ask in advance if you should expect extra costs.

As the pandemic spread earlier this year, dental offices in the U.S. mostly closed, except for [emergency care](#). By the end of June, nearly all offices had reopened, according to surveys by the American Dental Association.

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