

May 5, 2020

Dear Illinois Dental Hygienist,

We understand many are worried and frightened about returning to work. Your IDHA leaders are here for everyone, and will continue to be. IDHA leadership have been working around the clock to stay as up to date as possible, advocate as much as possible, and to keep hygienists as informed as possible. You all also have many dental hygiene Facebook groups for support and guidance amongst yourselves. Entire dental teams have concerns for themselves, their families and our patients. Please do not allow yourself to fall into the Us versus Them trap. Your employer should be just as worried and supportive of keeping their employees safe and healthy. But, if they are not...well, we will discuss that later on in this statement.

In the upcoming weeks ahead, when we all begin returning to work, IDHA wants to help guide not only our valued members but *guide all hygienists in Illinois*, because that is what IDHA supports. Smack dab in the middle of the IDHA purpose is "...to provide professional communications...", and that is what we have done for the entire duration of this pandemic, and will continue to do.

Let's take a moment to review our dental hygiene oath:

"In my practice as a dental hygienist, I affirm my personal and professional commitment to improve the oral health of the public, to advance the art and science of dental hygiene, and to promote high standards of quality care.

I pledge continually to improve my professional knowledge and skills, to render a full measure of service to each patient entrusted to my care, and to uphold the highest standards of professional competence and personal conduct in the interests of the dental hygiene profession and the public it serves."

Please keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to safely return to work, not to stay home permanently. If the fear of returning to work is too overwhelming for some, now would be the time to reflect upon whether to continue in this job field or move onto another with fewer health risks. Dental hygienists have always worked in conditions that place us, and our patients, at a higher risk of exposure to viruses and bacteria during treatment procedures. Reflecting upon our dental hygiene oath, in order to live up to this oath, we **must practice with high standards of quality care**- which include following appropriate PPE and infection control precautions. If your office is not following those infection control precautions, it is *your duty* within that oath to ensure this occurs. Report to your employer about where their shortcomings are concerning these infection control precautions and insist they adhere and follow those precautions. If they refuse, it is *your duty* to then report the office to the proper authorities. You can do so in a manner of requesting for an office evaluation to be done. For many years, employees have fallen victim to the bullying thought regarding being retaliated against for standing up for their safety at work. This is a **direct violation** of the OSHA act that was set up in 1970 to protect all workers in the United States, you have the **right to a safe workplace**.

Let's take another moment to review what OSHA act is all about:

*To assure **safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women**; by authorizing enforcement of the standards developed under the Act; by assisting and encouraging the States in their efforts to assure safe and healthful working conditions; by providing for research, information, education, and training in the field of occupational safety and health; and for other purposes.*

SEC.2.Congressional Findings and Purpose (some irrelevant portions removed)

(a) The Congress finds that personal injuries and illnesses arising out of work situations impose a substantial burden upon, and are a hindrance to, interstate commerce in terms of lost production, wage loss, medical expenses, and disability compensation payments.

(b) The Congress declares it to be its purpose and policy, through the exercise of its powers to regulate commerce among the several States and with foreign nations and to provide for the general welfare, to assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the Nation safe and healthful working conditions and to preserve our human resources –

(1) by encouraging employers and employees in their efforts to reduce the number of occupational safety and health hazards at their places of employment, and to stimulate employers and employees to institute new and to perfect existing programs for providing safe and healthful working conditions;

(2) by providing that employers and employees have separate but dependent responsibilities and rights with respect to achieving safe and healthful working conditions;

(3) by authorizing the Secretary of Labor to set mandatory occupational safety and health standards applicable to businesses affecting interstate commerce, and by creating an Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission for carrying out adjudicatory functions under the Act;

(4) by building upon advances already made through employer and employee initiative for providing safe and healthful working conditions;

(5) by providing for research in the field of occupational safety and health, including the psychological factors involved, and by developing innovative methods, techniques, and approaches for dealing with occupational safety and health problems;

(6) by exploring ways to discover latent diseases, establishing causal connections between diseases and work in environmental conditions, and conducting other research relating to health problems, in recognition of the fact that occupational health standards present problems often different from those involved in occupational safety;

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(7) by providing medical criteria which will assure insofar as practicable that no employee will suffer diminished health, functional capacity, or life expectancy as a result of his work experience;

(10) by providing an effective enforcement program which shall include a prohibition against giving advance notice of any inspection and sanctions for any individual violating this prohibition;

(12) by providing for appropriate reporting procedures with respect to occupational safety and health which procedures will help achieve the objectives of this Act and accurately describe the nature of the occupational safety and health problem;

(13) by encouraging joint labor-management efforts to reduce injuries and disease arising out of employment.

SEC.5.Duties

(a) Each employer --

(1) shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees;

(2) shall comply with occupational safety and health standards promulgated under this Act.

(b) Each employee shall comply with occupational safety and health standards and all rules, regulations, and orders issued pursuant to this Act which are applicable to his own actions and conduct.

- To file a complaint to OSHA you can contact them here:
https://www.osha.gov/workers/file_complaint.html
- To review the recent OSHA guidelines related to dentistry, you can view them here:
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/dentistry.html>
- This is the link for IL Department of Labor regarding safe workspaces.
<https://www2.illinois.gov/idol/Pages/default.aspx>

We would like to take a moment to thank all the dentists and office owners who are taking every precaution, following every recommendation, and also those who are going above and beyond the recommendations to keep their employees and patients safe. As we have heard from other Illinois dental hygienists, not all offices are following the guidance and recommendation provided.

The current OSHA guidance (see link above) states: "Only [patients needing urgent and emergency procedures](#) should be seen during the pandemic. Consistent with [CDC recommendations](#), all elective dental procedures should be postponed. Limiting services to urgent or emergency treatment will help control dental workers' possible exposure to sick patients." **No office is required to be closed to routine care in the state of Illinois** according

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to the Government issued [Stay at Home Mandate](#), but it is in the best interest of the public for the dental office to be closed to routine dental care, as advised by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). IDHA is in agreement with ISDS that offices in Illinois should remain closed to routine care until at least June 1, 2020 in the areas of the state with significant active and increasing COVID-19 cases. If your office is opening up now, or in the near future, please use your best professional and ethical judgment, along with the guidance provided to determine whether you are returning to work in a safe environment. Please, we urge you, to be strong and utilize all the information and assistance we are providing to keep us all **#SafeAtWork**.

IDHA hopes that this update finds you in better spirits, more relaxed, and more confident about returning to work safely. Take one last moment here and take a long, slow, deep breath in- hold it for three seconds- and then slowly breathe out. ***“The chaos doesn’t end, you kinda’ just become the calm.”- Nikki Rowe.***

Respectfully,

Your Illinois Dental Hygienists’ Association Board of Trustees