



In Illinois, there is a certification that a dental hygienist can acquire called the Public Health Dental Hygienist certification. This certification was signed and placed within the IL Dental Practice Act law in 2016. Discussions with IL lawmakers regarding the type of curriculum and hours required for this certification resolved in July 2019, so Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association quickly worked to create the review course and exam to begin the coursework, holding the first course in March 2020.

What does a Public Health Dental Hygienist Do?

A Public Health Dental Hygienist (PHDH) can practice in a public health setting: federally qualified health center (FQHC); a Federal, State, or local public health facility; Head Start; a special supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) facility; or a certified school-based health center or school-based oral health program.

A PHDH has a written collaborative agreement with, and is employed by, a licensed IL dentist. The collaborative dentist still collects the payment from the patient just as they normally would in typical practice settings, however the PHDH is just legally allowed to provide routine preventive care to Medicaid eligible and low-income patients of all ages, and health conditions, prior to the dentist examining the patient. Doctor/patient relationship is still intact, as the *collaborative dentist is still overseeing that patient's care* and will still be performing a thorough (or routine) exam, but at a later date. **This certification does not allude to independent practice of an IL dental hygienist, only satisfies the goal to provide access to care for underserved populations, which aligns with the Federal objectives of Healthy People 2030.**



What are the qualifications for certification?



According to the Dental Practice Act, a Public Health Dental Hygienist (PHDH) means a hygienist who holds a valid license to practice in the State, has 2 years of full-time (or an equivalent of 4,000 hours) clinical experience, and has completed at least 42 clock hours* of additional structured courses in dental education in areas specific to public health dentistry- along with a competency exam upon completion.

* The 42 hours of coursework required for PHDH certification *must include* emergency procedures for medically compromised patients (5 hours); pharmacology (5 hours); medical recordkeeping procedures (4 hours); geriatric dentistry (5 hours); pediatric dentistry (5 hours); pathology (5 hours); and 5 hours of their choice between these topics: special needs dentistry, teledentistry, nutritional needs of geriatric and low income patients, communication techniques with non-English speaking patients, cultural competency, and professional ethics. Additionally, the completion of an 8-hour live classroom review that includes a comprehension exam is part of the certification requirements.

The Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association (IDHA) has a long history of striving to increase Access to Care because the current system prevents many patients from accessing preventive care. Licensed Illinois dental hygienists and Public Health Dental Hygienists are educated, experienced, certified and licensed to provide preventive dental care to all patients from infants to senior citizens, including those with complex medical issues. PHDHs will still be providing the same quality of care they have been already providing to patients for years in other settings.

