



All Primary Care Dental Teams in Wales

17 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

On 12 March Wales and the rest of the UK moved from the containment phase to the delay phase of our response to COVID-19.

At this time, we are not aware of any dental team members who have tested positive for COVID-19 in Wales. However, we are aware of the concern this pandemic is causing and want to give clarity and direction to the dental community.

The Welsh Government; Public Health Wales (PHW); and Health Boards are updating pandemic flu plans and more details will emerge in the coming days and weeks to support you to deal with this outbreak at a local level. The purpose of this letter is to focus on what that might mean in practical terms for General Dental Practice and Community Dental Service teams in Wales.

It is our professional, personal and moral obligation to take care of ourselves, our families, our colleagues and our communities at this time. We all need to stay vigilant in this evolving situation and please ensure you keep up to date with advice and publications from the Welsh Government, PHW and Health Boards.

Health Boards and colleagues in Dental Public Health are updating pandemic flu plans and it will mean that there will be designated Urgent/Emergency Dental Care centres established in each Health Board area to treat infected individuals who are experiencing dental pain, swelling or bleeding where treatment cannot be delayed.

It is becoming clear that providing routine dentistry ‘as normal’ is no longer sustainable. Not least because aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) are frequent daily occurrences in routine dental care and should be avoided in this delay phase but also because people in vulnerable groups (older people and those with underlying health conditions) need to stay at home and reduce close personal contact that would occur in waiting rooms and surgeries. We are also aware that practices and services are experiencing growing numbers of DNAs and cancellations. We need to take action to protect the public and dental teams and move to AMBER dental alert.

Dental alert level Amber	Normal Dental Services are affected and some/all routine care is no longer possible	Emergency Dental Treatment for infected patients at designated sites and emergency treatment for non infected patients at multiple sites.	Dental activity levels are reduced
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The CMO Alert published on 13.03.2020 was also sent to dentists to provide clarification of actions needed as we move to the delay phase of the COVID-19 response.

It confirmed a significant change to how we identify and manage potential cases of COVID-19. Advice for NHS organisations in Wales is now:

The public and also staff are being advised to stay at home (self-isolate) without any testing for COVID-19, regardless of travel history or contact with confirmed cases, if they have: A new continuous cough OR a High temperature (of 37.8 degrees centigrade or higher).

It also included the following advice:

Guidance for Health Care Workers

- Healthcare workers should wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (aprons, gloves and a fluid repellent mask whilst assessing and treating patients; gowns, gloves, FFP3 masks and eye protection whilst performing aerosol generating procedures).
- Healthcare workers should follow the guidance for the general public and stay at home for 7 days if they develop any symptoms.

- Healthcare workers who come into contact with a COVID-19 patient whilst not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) can remain at work. If they display any symptoms of lower or upper-respiratory tract infection they must immediately stay at home for the duration of the illness or 7 days, whichever is longer.
- Healthcare workers do not need to be tested for COVID-19, prior to returning to work.

We have interpreted the first bullet point of this advice to be relevant to dental teams providing care (that cannot be delayed) to infected cases in the designated Urgent/Emergency Centres. It would not be practicable or necessary for all dental practices and services to have FFP3 masks.

Current guidance now states entire households must isolate for 14 days if any member has either of the two key symptoms of high temperature or continuous cough.

Therefore, from today:

1. Dental teams need to establish if a patient who has a booked appointment is a potentially infective case prior to any the visit by phone or text or on arrival. Use clearly visible and bilingual instructions at entrance.
2. Given the potential risk of asymptomatic cases attending in this delay phase it seems sensible and necessary at this time to reduce exposure of staff and patients to infection by avoiding all aerosol generating procedures wherever possible.
3. Reduce the number of routine check-ups by cancelling patients from vulnerable groups (and offer cancellation to anyone else who wishes to do so) to reduce the need to travel and have close contact with others in waiting rooms and surgeries. This will also conserve supplies of PPE for urgent care and free up capacity for urgent and necessary care that cannot be delayed.
4. Provide released capacity to treat urgent dental problems (on those who are well and/or in time who have recovered) and provide care that cannot be delayed.
5. Use robust IC procedures, wiping down surfaces between patients with extra vigilance to include door handles etc. and use standard PPE – you can use full face visors which also provide eye protection or masks.

In line with the principles the Minister outlined in the Written Statement of 13 March: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-coronavirus-covid-19-2>

Practices will be supported and continue to receive practice monthly income. Monitoring and UDA targets will be relaxed or suspended as confirmed. Details of how this will operate will be confirmed later this week. Continue to submit FP17W and collect PCR as appropriate for the patients you do see.

Practices need to make sure that they review their business continuity plans, they will need to work with Health Boards and other practices locally to ensure patients and the public can access urgent care and advice in normal opening hours.

Please make sure answering machine messages, websites and all communications are accurate and accessible. Please also be prepared to work in other ways to support local efforts. The Urgent/Emergency dental care centres need to be staffed. Dental teams also have transferable skills and released capacity maybe required to support the NHS effort locally in the challenging weeks ahead of all of us.

My thoughts go out to all of you at this time. This is truly an evolving situation and we all need to take a leadership and proactive stance to ensure we are doing our part to delay the spread of COVID-19 in order to protect ourselves and the communities around us.

More detailed guidance and advice will follow locally in revised pandemic flu plans.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colette Bridgman', written in a cursive style.

Colette Bridgman
Prif Swyddog Deintyddol
Chief Dental Officer

Cc: Heads of Primary Care all Health Boards
Welsh Dental Committee (including LDCs)
CDS Clinical Directors
BDA Wales