

BE PROUD OF YOUR MOUTH

Protect your oral health during the COVID-19 pandemic

The mouth is one of the main entry points for the virus that can cause COVID-19 and infections such as the flu. Look after your oral health by adopting a good oral hygiene routine and managing risk factors, to protect yourself and others.

A healthy mouth not only allows you to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions with confidence and without pain, but it also has a positive impact on your general health, well-being and quality of life.



1. Practice a good oral hygiene routine

Wash your hands with soap and water before brushing your teeth¹.

- Brush for two minutes, twice a day, using a fluoride toothpaste. When brushing is not possible, rinse with a fluoride mouthwash or chew sugar-free gum after meals and snacks instead.
- Replace your toothbrush every three months, or immediately after you have been ill¹.
- Avoid sharing personal items with people who are ill². This includes your toothbrush¹.
- Floss at least once a day. Never reuse floss and do not re-use interdental cleaners if you were ill.



2. Eat a balanced, low-sugar diet

The COVID-19 pandemic can lead to stress and uncertainty. Stress can affect food preferences and may increase the intake of foods high in sugar³. Sugar is the number one cause of tooth decay (dental caries), which like most oral health conditions can be prevented.

- Eat a well-balanced diet that is low in sugar and high in fruit and vegetables. Adults should have no more than six teaspoons of sugar daily; for children it's three.
- Do not eat sugary snacks and treats between meals. Having sugar *throughout* the day increases the risk of developing tooth decay.
- Favour water as your main drink. Consuming sugary drinks regularly (around one can per day) is not only bad for your mouth, but can also increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and obesity.

3. Take charge of your oral health

Stressed people are often more likely to drink alcohol or smoke³.

Harmful use of alcohol is strongly linked with an increased risk of several cancers, including cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx and oesophagus. Furthermore, the acid and high sugar content of most alcoholic drinks can erode your teeth and cause tooth decay.

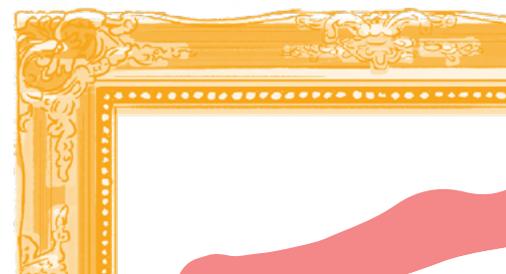
Tobacco in any form, smoking or smokeless, is unsafe. Tobacco use puts your mouth at an increased risk of gum disease and oral cancer. It also causes teeth staining, bad breath, premature tooth loss, and loss of taste and smell.

4. Consult your dentist

Prevention is the best way to avoid oral health problems. However, if you need dental care during the COVID-19 pandemic, do not suffer in silence.

If the policy in your country or community requires people to stay at home (lockdown), getting medical care, including going to the dentist, can be an exception to this rule².

- If you already had an appointment in the diary for a regular check-up, call the dental practice and discuss with the staff whether you should postpone this appointment due to the local or national situation.
- If you have a toothache (dental pain), bleeding that will not stop, a broken tooth or crown, signs of infection, such as swelling and pain⁴, do not wait until it gets worse. Call the dental practice and schedule an appointment to visit the dentist as soon as possible.
- Do not attempt to treat or relieve any dental problem by yourself⁵.



- If possible, go to the appointment alone. Only children and dependants should be accompanied⁶.
- Arrive on time, rather than early, to minimize the time in the waiting room with other patients⁷.
- Practice physical distancing when you are in the waiting room⁶.
- Always follow the rules established by your dental clinic.

Depending on where you live, and if you need to visit the dentist, you must follow the national/regional recommendations and contact the dentist for guidance if:

- you have tested positive for COVID-19;
- you have COVID-19 symptoms (dry cough, fever, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, sore throat, headache);
- you live with someone or were in contact with someone with COVID-19.



5. Protect yourself and others

Remember the general rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol².
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth².
- Wear a mask, where recommended.
- Stay at home if your national or local policies require you to do so².
- Practice physical distancing and stay at least 2 meters away from other people².



1. Dental Health Foundation Ireland. *Tooth Brushing Coronavirus and COVID 19*. Available from: www.dentalhealth.ie/assets/files/pdf/toothbrushes_-_covid_19_april_2020.pdf [Accessed 3 July 2020].

2. COVID-19 Health Literacy Project in collaboration with Harvard Health Publishing. *About COVID-19*. Available from: covid19healthliteracyproject.com [Accessed 4 July 2020].

3. Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School. *Why stress causes people to overeat*. Available from: www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-stress-causes-people-to-overeat [Accessed 3 July 2020].

4. University of Maryland Medical System. *Going to the dentist during the coronavirus*. Available from: www.umms.org/coronavirus/what-to-know/managing-medical-conditions/getting-care/dentist [Accessed 3 July 2020].

5. Dental Tribune. *DIY dentistry during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic*. Available from: coronavirus.dental-tribune.com/news/diy-dentistry-during-the-sars-cov-2-pandemic [Accessed 4 July 2020].

6. ANDI Associazione Nazionale Dentisti Italiani. *Changes to Dental Practice during the COVID-19 Pandemic* [video webinar]. *FDI Oral Health Campus; 2020 July 8*. Available from: www.fdioralhealthcampus.org/webinar/changes-to-dental-practice-during-the-covid-19-pandemic

7. Oral Health Foundation. *Patient information for waiting room in dental practices* [video file]. 2020 June 5. Available from: www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8d0pFdVrSI&feature=youtu.be.

Good oral health can help you live a longer, healthier life

For more information, visit www.worldoralhealthday.org
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