

BY EMAIL ONLY

All GDPs

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2 August 2021

Dear Practitioner

Re: Infection Prevention and Control guidance

You will be aware that we are currently entering a new stage of the COVID-19 pandemic with vaccination rates increasing, cases falling, restrictions easing and general guidance frequently changing. As such I would like to update you, from a dental perspective, on the impact of these changes and potential changes in the future.

Although restrictions have been eased in some social situations with variations across the four UK nations, restrictions largely remain in place in all health and care settings. Accordingly, practices should continue to follow the guidance outlined in the GDS Operational Guidance with the most recent version issued on 2 February 2021. Currently work is underway, led by Public Health England, to review the wider COVID-19 related Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance with the intention that a revised version is published in September 2021 along with a refreshed Dental Appendix. The GDS Operational Guidance will be updated and reissued as soon as possible after the UK IPC documents are published and we will continue to work with the BDA on this important piece of work.

I would like to provide clarity in regard to a number of specific issues that have been raised recently:

Face Coverings

Patients should continue to be asked to wear a face covering unless they have an exemption or reasonable excuse. Social distancing of 2 metres should also be maintained in dental practices. The Public Health Agency has recently released advice for the public when in a healthcare setting. This is available

here: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/continue-follow-public-health-advice-when-healthcare-settings>

Self-isolation

You may be aware of the recent CMO letter HSS MD 49 2021 which outlines scenarios in which health care workers who have been deemed to be close contacts can continue to work in exceptional circumstances. This letter is available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-hss-md-49-2021.pdf>

Within the GDS it is not expected that dental staff who are close contacts of COVID-19 cases will meet the necessary criteria to be permitted to continue working. Instead, staff members who have been deemed to be close contacts should follow appropriate self-isolation advice. In the event that there is insufficient staff available for a dental practice to remain open, COVID-19 business continuity plans should be followed.

International Travel

NI Executive guidance regarding self-isolation following international travel is constantly under review and updated frequently. The latest NI travel advice is available here: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-advice>

Practices should review and update their screening questions in line with any updates. As a general rule of thumb patients who are required to self-isolate following international travel should not attend or enter the practice. If treatment cannot be postponed or provided remotely then referral to an UDCC should be considered.

Communication with the public

It is clear that dental practices are not back to business as usual and the HSCB are currently working with the BDA to ensure that this message is shared with members of the public.

I would like to thank you and your teams again for your continued effort in providing care and treatment to your patients particularly during the warm summer months. As stated above any future changes to the GDS Operational Guidance will be shared with you as promptly as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Donaldson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'M'.

Michael Donaldson
Head of Dental Services