



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Dentists' Safeguards Protect Albertans during Flu Season**

As flu season approaches, it's reassuring to know that Alberta dentists practice stringent infection control. The Alberta Dental Association + College (ADA+C) has an infection control committee to set standards for the profession and continually updates an infection control manual that sits in every dentist's office and is available on-line.

"The manual spells out what dentists must do," said Dr. Stuart Root, a dentist in Peace River, who chairs the ADA+C's Infection Control + Prevention Committee. "We need to sterilize our instruments, disinfect all surfaces (including lights and chairs) between patient visits, clean the water lines between patients, and perform regular equipment checks and tests on the autoclaves (heat sterilizer), water retraction valves and other equipment."

Besides cleaning, sterilizing and disinfecting, there are frequent checks in the office and the laboratory to ensure all is well. A standard biological spore test on sterilizers is done regularly. Other standard precautions include the use of disposable items that come into direct contact with a patient's mouth, e.g. needle tips or the tips of irrigation and drying hoses, and their safe disposal.

Dentists and their staff use protective barriers such as eye protectors, disposable masks and gloves, and clothing such as lab coats or uniforms that are worn only in the office and changed at least daily. In addition, it is recommended that dentists and dental staff have up-to-date immunizations against common communicable diseases, including influenza shots, to provide protection for both the dentist and the patient.

Dentists check a patient's health history at each visit and advise people presenting with a known cold or flu to reschedule their appointments. However, not everyone knows whether they have contracted something in the early stages, so standard precautions call for each patient to be managed as if they have an infectious disease.

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“Our approach is the same as those of anyone in healthcare,” says Dr. Luke Shwart, manager of Calgary Health Region’s Community Oral Health Service. “Dentists are very aware that infection control can be a concern for patients. We ensure that all of our staff are very well trained and vigilant in maintaining standard protocols.”

Though infection control standards are taught in university and practiced by every dentist, the Alberta Dental Association + College has been provincially proactive in this area. The provincial infection control reference manual is updated frequently. Dental patients are treated with state-of-the-art infection control and prevention protocols. As required under the Health Professions Act, dental offices will soon be regularly inspected.

“It may look like overkill,” says Shwart, “but it’s extremely important. We constantly strive to be as good as we can be.”

In the event of a communicable disease outbreak, dentists, who are an integral part of the healthcare team, follow additional protocols imposed by the provincial medical officer of health or Health Canada.

For further information on oral health and infection control, talk to your dentist or visit [www.abda.ab.ca](http://www.abda.ab.ca).

**Media contact:**

Kimberly Carriere, Director  
Communications, Marketing + Member Services  
Alberta Dental Association + College  
Phone: (780) 432-1012 or toll free 1-800-843-3848