

# CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## DENTAL PRACTICE ADVISORY



### **Infection Control in Dental Practices and Regulatory Response**

The Department of Public Health is authorized under Connecticut General Statutes, 19a-14(10)(11) to investigate complaints against health care practitioners. The Dental Practice Act which is defined in Chapter 379 of the Connecticut General Statutes allows the Department and the Board to seek disciplinary action under Section 20-114 for “incompetence or negligent conduct toward a patient”.

Over the past two years, the Department has seen an increase in the number of complaints involving infection control practices and unsanitary conditions in dental practices. The Department takes these issues very seriously and considers it a high priority to initiate an investigation and on-site inspection, generally within one week of having received the complaint.

Complaints come from a variety of sources, including: patients, other practitioners, family members, employees and ex-employees and local health inspectors. Between 2010 and 2013 the Department received an average of four (4) complaints per year regarding infection control issues. In 2014 the Department received fourteen (14), over a 300 percent increase. Of the 2014 complaints six (6) were referred to the Department’s legal office and so far one has resulted in disciplinary action and one dentist has been summarily suspended. In 2015, to date, DPH has received seven (7) complaints. Of the 2015 cases one (1) was closed, five are still under investigation and one (1) has resulted in a suspension of the dentist’s license.

#### **How does the Department of Public Health Evaluate Infection Control Practices?**

1. The Department’s primary source for standards is the “*Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings*” published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2003: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5217.pdf> (Note: A revision of the guidelines is pending.)
2. Does the practice use universal precautions when indicated including changing gloves and hand washing between patients?
3. Is the practice in compliance with the manufacturer’s recommendations for the sterilization and maintenance of instruments and hand pieces? Hand pieces should be sterilized between patients.
4. Is the practice in compliance with the manufacturer’s recommendations for the expiration date of cold sterilization products? Are the products diluted according to manufacturer recommendations?

5. Are surfaces cleaned and disinfected between patients?
6. General cleanliness of the operatory(s).
7. Are clean and dirty activities appropriately separated for cleaning, decontaminating and sterilization of instruments?
8. Is staff trained regarding infection control practices and procedures?
9. Are sterile items and dental supplies stored appropriately?
10. Are all medications and materials within their expiration date?
11. Are counters and surfaces free of dust, debris and liquids?
12. Are autoclaves clean and rust free?
13. Are autoclave logs maintained and onsite?
14. Does the practice use chemical indicators for each sterilization load and is spore testing done weekly?
15. Does the practice have infection control policies and procedures?

**Other things the Department may look at during an inspection:**

16. Are biohazardous waste materials stored appropriately and does the practice have a contract with a biohazardous waste management company?
17. Are dental assistants who are taking x-rays, Dental Assisting National Board Certified (DNB) to take x-rays?
18. Is x-ray equipment Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) certified and are lead aprons properly hung and maintained?

The Department's investigators are trained in infection control and all have attended either a dental infection control course at UCONN or through other accredited programs. Any determination of non-compliance with infection control standards are shared with the practitioner at the time of the inspection. The practitioner will then be provided with a notice of violations. If there are minor infractions, the practitioner will be given an opportunity to provide a plan of correction. Many times a follow-up inspection will be conducted to determine compliance.

Serious issues of failure to follow infection control standards or continued non-compliance may result in disciplinary action against the dentist's license.

**For questions regarding this advisory, contact Kathleen Boulware or Jolanta Gawinski of the Department's Practitioner Licensing and Investigations Section at 860-509-7552.**

