



RECHARGED & READY: POST COVID Q&A — FOR DENTAL OFFICES —

13 Extraordinary Answers for Your Patients' Questions

Preparing for patient questions

Do it now! You and your team should be ready to skillfully answer these questions as you begin to reopen your practice, care for patients, & rebuild your practice success.

Schedule a meeting: We strongly recommend scheduling a meeting with your team to review & practice these answers so you sound clear, confident, caring, & professional... and you don't miss a beat filling & maximizing your schedule.

LionSpeak can help! Practice & refine your patient communications on a virtual meeting with one of our skilled trainers. We'll customize the training to include the specific questions your patients are asking. **Take advantage of our offer at the end of this document or reach out for customized support at info@lionspeak.net.**



Questions concerning the safety and infection control in your office

Q: How do I know it's safe to come to the office?

- **Reminders:**
 - Be transparent with your patients about the protective protocols you're putting into place.
 - Speak in patient-friendly terms, not clinical jargon.
 - Reiterate that you've always taken infection control very seriously and are now adding to those precautions.
 - Notice where we have recommended the use of the word "and" instead of the word "but" to connect two thoughts or positions.
- "Thank you for asking this question. We want you to feel completely comfortable about returning to our office for your care."
- **Highest Standards:** "We have always taken infection control very seriously and, in light of the current situation, we have upgraded those protocols to the highest possible standards. We have increased the frequency and thoroughness of our sanitizing procedures and are following all safety guidelines recommended by the CDC, ADA and OSHA."
- **Infection Control Procedure List:** "We've created a complete list of all of our procedures for your review which includes our team's commitment to put your safety first and to go above and beyond to ensure a safe dental care environment. If you'd like a copy, I'd be happy to get one to you immediately."
- **Team Member Precautions:** "Some of our precautions with team members include: (examples...)"
 - N95 masks
 - Gowns, hair bonnets (Disposable or Fabric)
 - Face shields
 - Taking temperatures daily of every team member
 - All team members changing into scrubs upon arrival and changing back to street clothes when they leave"



- **Patient Precautions:** "Some of our precautions with our patients include: (examples...)
 - Pre-procedure mouth rinse
 - Air ionizer / purifier
 - Extra oral vacuum to collect aerosols
 - Handpiece sterilizer that can be reprogrammed to decontaminate
 - Utilizing a pre-screening checklist which includes questions concerning recent travel, positive COVID testing, current or recent symptoms with patient and/or family members such as trouble breathing or coughing and, if yes, were precautions taken with a quarantine
 - Protective rubber dams used in the mouth to add protection
 - New carpet installed in treatment rooms"
- "Are there any other questions I can answer or any other concerns I can help with?"

Q: Is it safe to be in the reception area?

- "We believe it is very safe in our reception area; however, we have taken some additional precautions: (examples...)
 - **No waiting in the reception area:** For now, we will be requesting that our patients call or text us when they arrive, and we will come and get them from the parking lot. We will not have patients waiting in the reception area as we have in the past.
 - **Patient protection:** A level-3 mask and hand sanitizer will be supplied to each patient as they enter the building.
 - **Prescreening:** We will be pre-screening patients by phone prior to their appointments as well as taking their temperature when they arrive.
 - **Reduced Occupancy:** Our door will remain locked to minimize the number of un-appointed people walking into our building. To provide for adequate physical distancing, we will limit the number of patients and team members present in the office at any given time.
 - **Reduced non-essential items:** We have reduced the number of non-essential items in our office which could be handled by patients such as magazines, books, toys, and drink stations.



- **Electronic prepayment:** We have arranged for payments, receipts, and insurance claims to be handled prior to your appointment and through an electronic process so we do not have to mutually handle credit cards or any unnecessary paperwork.
- **Entry/Exit Doors:** We will designate one door for patient entry and another for departure.
- **Restrooms:** We are checking restrooms frequently and disinfecting after every use.
- **Handles & Door Knobs:** All handles and door knobs will be disinfected after each “touch point”.
- **Protective reception barriers:** We have installed protective plexiglass at reception desk or face shields worn by our administrative team."

Q: Have any of your patients or team members tested positive for COVID-19?

- **Yes**
 - **Team Member:** "Yes, and the team member has been asked to stay home for a minimum of 14 days per ADA guidelines and will be re-tested before returning to work."
 - **Patient:** "Yes, we have had a patient who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and, just like hospitals, we adhere to the idea of Universal Precautions and treat every patient we see as if they might have the virus. We took the precautions necessary with our PPE as well as carefully sterilizing the entire office to ensure that the virus would not be spread. We've seen no additional cases since that time. Everyone on our team and many other patients have felt very safe returning to the office, and we believe you will be safe as well, or we would not be seeing patients. "
- **No**
 - "No, and we're following all of the ADA guidelines, including taking the temperature of all employees and patients before they enter the building each day. We are closely monitoring all team members and patients as well as asking them to alert us if they have any family members that have developed symptoms."



Financial questions

Q: I am not sure I can afford my care. (I'm out of a job, I've lost my benefits, etc.)

- "We understand that COVID-19 has put many of our patients into challenging financial situations. Because of these unique challenges, we have expanded our financial options to allow you a variety of ways to work the cost of treatment into your budget."
- Discuss the financial options your office has available such as: CareCredit.com, DocPay.com, in-house membership plan, pre-payment plan or layaway-type plan, etc.

Q: Can I finish my treatment if I've lost my benefits?

- "Yes, of course. We will want you to complete your care and will work with you to leverage any existing COBRA benefits and/or create new financial arrangements that will be comfortable for both of us."

Questions about scheduling and/or treatment

Q: Confirmation/Pre-screening

- "Hello, Jane. This is Katherine from HomeTown Dental. How are you today? ... "
- Be sure to use "looking forward to seeing you" (versus "confirming your appointment") and call the provider specifically by name.
- "Dr. Smith asked me to give you a call to let you know he is very much looking forward to seeing you on Thursday at 9:00 to prepare your tooth for a crown."
- **COVID-19 pre-appointment screening:** "To alleviate concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 virus, would it be alright if I ask you a few pre-screening questions? (Examples...)
 - Do you have any respiratory symptoms such as a cough or shortness of breath?
 - Have you tested positive for the COVID-19 virus?
 - Have you traveled to an affected area within the last 14 days?
 - Have you had close contact with a person infected with the COVID-19 virus or who has traveled to an affected area within the last 14 days?



- Are you over the age of 65?
- Are you pregnant
- Do you have a chronic lung condition, heart disease, diabetes, or take an immunosuppressive medication?"
- **Explain protocol:** "Thank you, Jane. It sounds like we're good to go and we're really looking forward to seeing you Thursday, May 25th. Your appointment time is at 9:00 a.m. however your check-in time is at 8:45. We ask that you text (this number) when you arrive in the parking lot and wait for our response before coming inside the office. When we have a room ready, we will come to your car and escort you in. We will, then, need to take your temperature and ask you a few additional questions. We will provide you with a Level-3 mask and hand sanitizer when you arrive. We also ask that anyone who accompanies you to the appointment wait in the car instead of our reception area. We can text them when you are finished and bring you out to meet them."
- **Reconfirm / Rescheduling Notice:** "We have set aside this time especially for you, Jane, so if for any reason you cannot keep your commitment, please provide us with as much notice as possible. Because we were closed for several months due to the COVID crisis and due to the reduction in the number of patients we can currently see in the office, we have a backlog of patients who are anxiously waiting for an appointment with Dr. Smith. We appreciate your understanding about how valuable these prime appointment times are."
- **Questions:** "Are there any questions I can answer for you, Jane?"
- **Conclusion:** "Dr. Smith and our entire team is truly looking forward to seeing you again and taking great care of you on Thursday at 9:00 a.m. See you then!"

Q: What is the cancellation policy if I develop symptoms between now and my appointment?

- **Advanced notice:** "We have always considered your appointment confirmed when it was scheduled. However, given the current circumstances and the backlog of patients needing to be seen, we do request and appreciate any advance notice you can provide, should you need to reschedule due to illness."



- **Waived cancellation fees:** "For now, we will be waiving our standard \$50 cancellation fee should you develop symptoms prior to your appointment."
- **Prescreening:** "We will reach out to you via phone, email, or text a couple days in advance of your appointment to prescreen you for symptoms."

Q: My husband's dentist told him that we will not be able to reschedule his cleaning appointment until September, how are you guys handling this with your schedule?

- "I'm sorry to hear that your husband is having to wait so long to return to his dental office. Everyone has been affected by this disruption in our schedules. We are working diligently on our own schedule to be able to quickly accommodate as many patients as we can and do so with the highest level of safety for them and our team. We anticipate expanding our hours to be able to have greater availability as well as other measures to see the most urgent patients first and then try to get all our patients back on track with their dental health as quickly as possible. We will be in touch via email, text, and on our social media pages to keep you informed and get you reappointed as soon as possible. Our patients have been terrific and so understanding as we try to sort this out and get back to normal. We appreciate your patience through this process."

Q: Can I bring my child with me to the office?

- "We must continue to practice social distancing at our office so I'm sorry that we cannot allow children to accompany their parents to their appointments. We feel strongly this would put your child as well as other patients at risk."
- "We are requesting that all patients refrain from bringing any other family members, especially children, to their appointment unless the family member is also receiving treatment or you need them to provide you with special assistance."



Q: Can my spouse (or caregiver) come with me?

- "Yes, however we do ask that they are prepared to wait for you in the car with a cell phone. We can text or call them when you are finished and ready to leave."

Q: Postponing patient appointments

- These are calls that are made to patients who currently have a scheduled appointment but need to be rescheduled due to other patients who are of higher urgency/priority and need to be seen sooner.

Because of a dramatic need for immediate cash flow, most practices will be attempting to create the most productive schedules possible when they return to work. You might consider identifying a list of what would constitute your "Best Fit" patients and moving others to make room for these patients first. LionSpeak trainer, Jamie Marboe, recommends the following:

Look back at the patients who were cancelled due to the COVID crisis. Attempt to first schedule the patients who:

- Have already accepted treatment
- Had an emergency but you've only been able to provide palliative treatment
- They have a history of keeping their appointments
- They have little or no outstanding balance
- They are feeling well and have not been affected by COVID

Other tips include:

- Scheduling perio treatment and restorative treatment on the same day so you maximize the use of your PPE supplies as well as meet scheduling requirements
- Create a good follow-up system when you begin to call patients for rescheduling, either within your current software program, using Dental Intel, or a Google Doc



We recommend verbiage such as this for pushing patients out in your schedule who do not meet the criteria for a "Best Fit" patient:

- "Hello, Jane. This is Katherine from Dr. Smith's office at HomeTown Dental. How are you today?..."
- "We have you scheduled for a professional cleaning appointment on Thursday, May 21st at 9:00 a.m., and Dr. Smith asked me to call you and see if we could move that appointment to a later date. Because of the COVID-19 crisis and the length of time we have been closed, we have a backlog of patients with urgent or time-sensitive needs. We are trying to rearrange our schedule to accommodate them and get you rescheduled to the soonest available date to make sure that you are also cared for as quickly as possible. We so appreciate your understanding and patience while we sort this out."

If you are not sure when you will have schedule availability, say:

- "We should know more about our availability for appointments like yours by (July 1st). Would it be all right if I give you a call then to provide an update on our schedule and determine the best appointment time for you?"

If you already filled your schedule with your available "Good Fit" patients and you have an available appointment, then use something like this:

- "Your hygienist, Sara, has an opportunity to see you either Thursday, June 18th at 9:00 a.m. or Monday, June 22nd at 1:00 p.m. Which would be best for you?"
- "Thank you again, Jane, for being so flexible and understanding. If you have any concerns or you experience any discomfort between now and your appointment on June 22nd, please do not hesitate to call so that we can make sure you are properly cared for."

Q: My COBRA insurance runs out at the end of June, and I have a crown that needs to be seated. What do we do?

- Advice from the LionSpeak coaches:
 - This is a non-essential procedure, but if all PPE is in place for the patient and the team, this can be done. If the crown was billed at prep date, consider holding off on this even if the COBRA expires. This would, then, be considered a no-charge visit and as long as the temporary is fine, reschedule them for a later date.



Patient outreach before and after returning to work

An appropriate and caring outreach to your patients before the office reopens will help to keep their oral health and your office top-of-mind as well as cement your concern for their well-being. You can also use this call to answer questions, calm their concerns, and be proactive about how things will work once the office reopens. These calls should be made by someone already employed by the office and should not be made to “sell” anything or with the purpose of “booking an appointment.” They are patient care calls to offer support and deepen their relationship with your practice.

COVID Care Calls:

- **Who you should call:**
 - Previously scheduled patients
 - Patients who already have appointments in the future
 - Patients who were seen for emergency care during the COVID crisis
 - Patients who are due or overdue but not scheduled
- **Before you call, be prepared with:**
 - Resources: Make sure you have familiarized yourself with online resources such as homecare & treatment videos, homecare products, etc.
 - Your practice’s enhanced PPE and treatment delivery guidelines
 - Your practice’s plan for reopening
 - A quick review of the patient’s history and records
- **Care Call Basic Structure:**
 - **Reason for the call:**
 - Checking on them
 - Answering any questions
 - Reassuring them about the future
 - **How are they doing?**
 - Be sure to speak calmly and optimistically, even if they aren’t
 - Don’t feel the need to solve their issues or offer advice... just listen and demonstrate empathy and understanding



- Use good judgement and flex your conversation to the patient's individual situation. Be sensitive to patients who may be experiencing something severe or upsetting. If they are ill, experiencing illness with a family member, have lost someone recently, or are in financial distress... you may not want to proceed with these additional items.
- **Questions:** Are there any questions about their dental care or home care that you can answer?
 - Many patients are asking questions about the following so be prepared to suggest ideas and resources for these:
 - Stress-related clenching and grinding
 - Postponed periodontal therapy appointments
 - Getting dental work completed if they have lost their jobs and/or benefits
- **Home care/treatment:**
 - Suggest ways they can stay on top of their homecare and reiterate how important it is since they won't be coming in on their regular schedule.
 - Suggest any resources or products that may help them during this time.
- **Assistance / Resources:**
 - Educating children on home care
 - Recommending resources/ solutions
 - Who to call in case of emergency
- **Referrals:**
 - Welcome referrals to anyone who does not already have a dentist and has an emergency or even just a question.



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