

Thank you for your continued patience as we learn of new and emerging information on COVID-19. We will continue to give SDDA members guidance based on the best information available and the most current data in South Dakota. This morning we learned that the state health lab did not receive the supplies needed to run COVID-19 tests on Tuesday, March 17, and is not currently running tests (Wednesday) due to the limited supply of testing material being made available to South Dakota.

With 350 tests pending, it is currently unknown if we have “community spread” of COVID-19 in South Dakota. Based on this information, the SDDA believes guidance from the American Dental Association and the Centers for Disease Control is applicable for all South Dakota dental offices. That guidance is to postpone all elective and routine dental procedures until further notice. The SDDA will provide further guidance once the result of pending tests are known.

To be clear, absent governmental directives (federal, state, county, or municipal), it is up to each individual dentist to exercise their professional judgement in deciding what additional precautions should be implemented and whether or how to continue dental office operations. Neither the Board of Dentistry, the Department of Health nor the Governor’s Office have given us any indication that they will require dental offices to close.

We understand that there are differences of opinion on what constitutes “elective and routine procedures”. In the case of this pandemic please consider treating any condition that, left untreated for the next eight weeks, could end up in an emergency room. We do not want to exacerbate the load on medical facilities with dental emergencies.

As this situation continues to evolve we recommend you continue to consult these two sites: www.ADA.org/virus and <https://doh.sd.gov/>. These sites have the most current recommendations regarding dentistry and actions here in South Dakota.

Also, the CDC is expected to release additional guidelines specifically for dental offices later this week and we will share this as soon as we have it.

As for closing your office please consider the following:

1. Create a communication plan for patients stressing the importance of their safety but assuring them that you are available for emergencies, if needed. Be sure to put this notice on your office voicemail, text network, website, social media accounts, and office door, etc.
2. Make an agreement with a nearby dental office to take on dental emergencies if you become unable to do so.
3. Have remote access to your patient schedule for the following eight weeks and a way to contact patients, if needed.
4. Be sure all employees have a clear understanding of the sick leave policy and PTO benefits. *We will send information on unemployment benefits etc. when reliable information is available.*