

Dentistry

IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Allied Staff News

Your Infection Control System Is Only as Strong as Your Busiest Day

Karen Daw, MBA, CECM, CDIPC | Risk & Safety Strategist

Most dental teams do not set out to make unsafe choices. In fact, most dental professionals care deeply about their patients, their coworkers, and doing things the right way. The problem is usually not a lack of caring. The problem is that infection control and OSHA safety often rely too heavily on memory, habit, and “this is how we’ve always done it.”

That works beautifully, until the schedule falls apart. A hygienist is running behind. A crown seat gets added to the schedule. A new assistant is covering for someone who called in sick. The sterilization area is overflowing. The doctor needs a room turned over now. Suddenly, the real infection control system is not the policy in the manual. It is what the team can realistically do under pressure.

From a risk perspective, the goal is not perfection. The goal is a system that is clear, consistent, documented, and resilient when the day gets messy.

The Better Question Is Not “Would We Get Cited?” Sometimes when OSHA or infection control topics come up, the conversation quickly becomes, “Would we really get cited for that?” or “Would OSHA actually fine a dental office for this?” I understand the question. No one wants to overreact, overcomplicate, or create unnecessary work. But from a systems perspective, that is not the strongest question.

A better question is this: “If there were an exposure, injury, complaint, failed sterilization cycle, or patient concern, could we explain and document what our system is designed to do?”

That question moves the conversation from penalties to prevention. It shifts the focus from “What can we get away with?” to “What would a well-run practice want to have in place?”

Risk is not only about the worst thing that could happen. It is about whether the practice has built a system that helps good people do the right thing consistently, even on the busiest day.

Surface Disinfection: The Wipe Is Not the Whole System. Most dental teams know they need to clean and disinfect clinical contact surfaces between patients. But the breakdown is often not whether the team owns the right disinfectant. It is whether the room turnover system supports correct use.

If the product requires a three-minute wet contact time, does the schedule allow for that? Does the team know the difference between wiping a surface and keeping it wet for the required time? Are barriers removed with contaminated gloves, then clean barriers placed with clean hands? Are light handles, delivery units, curing lights, touchscreens, keyboards, and countertops addressed consistently?

When practices bring me in to review their infection control and safety systems, this is often where the “aha” moment happens. The team has the product. They know surfaces need to be disinfected. But the actual sequence may vary from person to person. That is a systems issue. A wipe is a product. Room turnover is a system.

Sterilization: Clean, Sterilized, and Documented Are Not the Same Thing. Instrument reprocessing has multiple steps: transport, cleaning, rinsing, drying, packaging, sterilization, storage,

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Delta Dental Insights

Health through Oral Wellness is one of Delta Dental of South Dakota’s largest investments in oral health, with over \$40 million paid in claims for additional preventive services since its 2020 launch. The July 7, 2026, Delta Dental Insights will feature a presentation on the program and its utilization over the past six years.

The session is Tuesday, July 7th at 12:30 CST/11:30 MST. The July session will also highlight Medicaid July 1, 2026 updates and Important reminders about keeping your dental office information current.

Join live on Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86259791274?pwd=npTcIVOt3Saahn2r8YL512FRFtKtzb.1> Meeting ID: 862 5979 1274. Passcode: 557576

What is Delta Dental Insights? Delta Dental Insights is held the first Tuesday of each quarter. This webinar series is an opportunity for dental offices to connect with Delta Dental of South Dakota. Each one-hour session includes important updates on commercial, South Dakota Medicaid, and Medicare Advantage business. One practice management CE has been approved by the SD Board of Dentistry for each session. Save the dates for the remaining 2026 Delta Dental Insights Sessions: July 7, 2026 and October 6, 2026. Past Delta Dental Insights recordings can be viewed on the Delta Dental of SD website. Click on Dentist and then Delta Dental Insights to watch! Questions? We are here to help! Contact us at 1-877-841-1478 or professionalrelations@deltadentalsd.com.

Lake Area Technical College Dental Hygiene Program Update

By Dr. Darlene Bogenpohl & Emily Olson

The Dental Hygiene Program at Lake Area Technical College in Watertown continues to make exciting progress toward welcoming its inaugural class.



On March 17–18, the program hosted its Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) site visit. We are pleased to share that the visit was very successful, with the site visitor finding no recommendations for changes to the program's curriculum and encouraging us to move forward in the accreditation process.

Our application for initial accreditation, along with the site visit report, will be reviewed during CODA's summer meeting July 6–8, followed by final consideration during the closed session meeting on August 6. We anticipate receiving final word regarding our initial accreditation status in mid-August.

In anticipation of a Fall 2026 start, the program accepted applications this spring and received an overwhelming response from highly qualified candidates across the region. Following interviews with the top 20 applicants, 13 students have been conditionally accepted pending approval of initial accreditation. We are incredibly excited to welcome our first cohort and are confident these students will become outstanding contributors to the dental profession and oral healthcare workforce in South Dakota.

The enthusiasm and support we have received from the South Dakota dental community throughout this process has been tremendous. We are grateful for the encouragement, collaboration, and interest shown by dental professionals across the state as we work to expand educational opportunities and help address the growing need for dental hygienists in our communities. We look forward to sharing additional updates in the coming months and are excited about the future of dental hygiene education at Lake Area Technical College.

Western Dakota Technical College Update

Western Dakota Technical College (WDTA) submitted the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) self-study report on May 1 and is currently awaiting assignment of a site review team. Construction of the dental hygiene clinic began in May and is anticipated to be completed by mid- to late-August. During the Fall semester, the program plans to initiate the hiring process for a full-time dental hygiene faculty member. Applications for the inaugural cohort will be reviewed in Spring 2027, with the first cohort of 10 students anticipated to begin the program in August 2027.



Your Infection Control System Is Only as Strong as Your Busiest Day *Continued from cover*

and documentation. If one step is unclear, rushed, or skipped, the entire system becomes vulnerable.

Here is a common real-world example. A practice runs biological indicators weekly, but when I ask, "What happens if one fails?" the room often gets quiet. Someone might say, "We would run it again," or "We would call the repair company," but the team does not always have a written, rehearsed response. That is not because they do not care. It is because the system was never fully built. A failed biological indicator is not the moment to start figuring out what to do. The practice should already know who to notify, whether instruments need to be quarantined, how loads are documented, and when sterilizer use must stop until the issue is resolved. In infection control, "pretty sure" is not a defensible system.

PPE and Training: "We Wear Gloves" Is Not a Program. When asked about PPE, many teams immediately say, "We wear gloves." That is a start, but OSHA expects appropriate PPE based on the task and potential exposure. In dentistry, that may include gloves, masks, protective eyewear, face shields, gowns or protective clothing, and utility gloves for instrument processing. The systems question is this: Does the team know which PPE is required for which task?

If PPE decisions are left to individual preference, the practice will have inconsistency. One person uses utility gloves in sterilization. Another says, "I'm just careful." That is not a reliable system. That is crossed fingers in scrubs.

The same is true for training. Watching another team member is helpful, but it is not the same as being trained. If the person being shadowed has developed shortcuts, those shortcuts become the training.

The Final Takeaway

The safest dental practices are not the ones where everyone simply promises to try harder. They are the ones that build reliable systems. At your next team huddle, pick one area: room turnover, sterilization, PPE, sharps safety, waterline maintenance, or exposure response. Then ask three questions:

What do we expect the team to do? Is it easy to do that correctly on our busiest day? How do we verify that it actually happened?

Because a strong infection control system should not depend on perfect people having a perfect day. It should help good people do the right thing, even on the messy ones.

Karen "The OSHA Lady"

Speaker, Consultant, Author

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Continuing Education Calendar

The listing of these programs is provided as a service to SDDA Newsletter subscribers, and does not mean that these programs have been endorsed or approved by the SD Dental Association or the SD State Board of Dentistry. All members are cautioned to evaluate the programs on their own merit.

WESTERN DAKOTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-718-2410; email: corped@wdt.edu

Third Friday of the month (AM)

- American Heart Association CPR Class for Healthcare Professionals

Third Friday of the month (PM)

- American Heart Association CPR Recertification for Healthcare Provider

SOUTHEAST TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: 605-367-4607 or corporateeducation@southeasttech.edu

Dental Radiology Course

- November 6-7, 2026
- March 5-6, 2027

LAKE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Contact: Nicole Pahl, 605-882-5284, ext. 362; Nicole.Pahl@lakeareatech.edu

www.lakeareatech.edu/corporate-education/corporate-education-registration/

Home Study Radiology Courses available:

- Radiology Safety
- Radiography Production

CPR COURSES: Contact: Tia Meyer; 605-842-5672 or meyertia@hotmail.com

605CPR: We provide AHA and/or Red Cross BLS/ACLS/PALS certification. Will travel for onsite delivery. www.605CPR.com; jr@605CPR.com; 605-525-4CPR (4277)

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

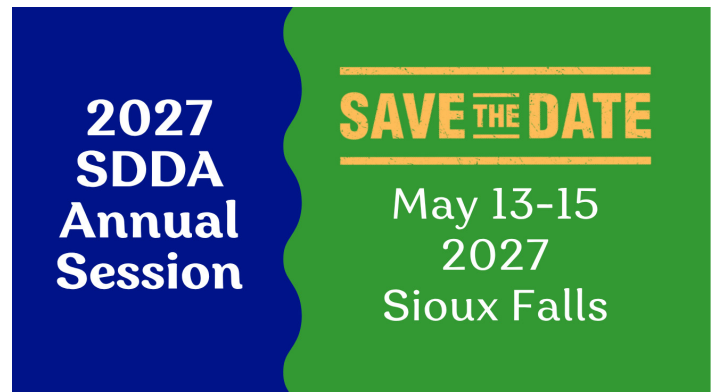
Contact: Dept. of Dental Hygiene, 605-658-5960

Home Study Courses available:

- Radiology Interpretation, Pathology & Anomalies
- Errors of PA's, BWS & Panoramic Radiography
- Oral Effects of Head & Neck Radiation Therapy
- Radiation Safety
- Portable Dental Radiography
- SDF

ADA CE ONLINE

Contact: engage.ada.org



Classified Ads

Missouri River Dentistry in **Fort Pierre, SD** is looking for a full-time, caring, patient-focused, and energetic professional to join our high-tech dental office for the following positions: **Certified Dental Assistant; Registered Dental Assistant; and Dental Assistant.** Ideal candidates will be team-oriented, outgoing, and passionate about learning and patient care. Applicants should have excellent interpersonal skills and be interested in joining a completely computer-based, high-tech dental office with digital x-rays. Duties will vary based on training and certification. Tasks may include, but are not limited to: Greet patients and explain dental treatment to create rapport and comfort during appointments; Take and document vital signs and medical history for patient records; Sterilize, prep, and lay out equipment, instruments, supplies, etc. for exams and dental procedures; Provide patient education about oral health care, post operative care, and dental hygiene; Maintain a clean and organized work environment; Clean and disinfect patient operatory rooms between appointments; Be aware of, adhere to, and maintain all dental office infection control policies and safety regulations by disinfecting and sterilizing equipment and instruments as necessary, as well as wearing masks, gloves and eyewear as necessary; Assist chairside during dental procedures; Complete patient chart notes for appointments during which employee assisted on; Other duties as assigned by Dr. Hofer. Missouri River Dentistry offers competitive wages and employee benefits. Wages range from \$16-\$28/hour depending on experience, education, certification and assigned duties. Wages include room for advancement based on continued training, education, and experience. Tuition/Student Loan Reimbursement and/or Sign-On Bonuses are available for the hired applicant(s). Benefits and incentives include, but are not limited to: Health Insurance; Dental Benefits; Paid Time Off; Paid Sick, Bereavement, and Jury Duty. Paid Holidays; Daily Team Bonus Incentive; Professional Development and CE Funding, IRA Matching. Scheduled Work Hours are as Follows: Monday - Thursday 7:45 AM - 3:15 PM and Friday 7:45 AM - 2:15 PM. We are a team-oriented staff that cross-trains and work together to support each other and achieve success each day. If you believe you would be a good fit for our office, please submit a cover letter and resume in person, by email, or via fax: Missouri River Dentistry; 304 Island Drive; Fort Pierre, SD 57532 | Email: info@missouririverdentistry.com | Fax: (605) 223 - 9021 | For more information, please feel free to contact us at any time via email or phone. info@missouririverdentistry.com | (605) 223 - 2021

Dentistry in South Dakota
804 N Euclid; Ste 103
Pierre SD 57501

Classified Ads

Dental Hygienist: Are you a dental hygienist looking to make a difference? Would you like to set your own schedule? Delta Dental of South Dakota's Mobile Program has collaborative supervision opportunities for dental hygienists. These opportunities include both—full time and part-time flexible schedules, including working specific weeks or months out of the year. The dental hygienists will work under collaborative supervision in South Dakota, primarily on the Pine Ridge or Cheyenne River Native American Reservations. The dental hygienists will join a team providing preventive services and oral health education in schools, Head Starts, etc. Extensive travel is required. May be eligible for benefits including health, dental, vision, life/long term disability insurance, paid holidays, vacation/sick leave, 401k, and more. For more information visit www.deltadentalsd.com. Submit a cover letter and resume to: summer.sporrer@deltadentalsd.com. Questions? Contact Zach Parsons at 605-494-2558.

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