

**From the Chief Dental Officer  
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**BY EMAIL**

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Dear Colleague

**Seasonal Respiratory Infections and COVID-19: General Dental Services - Operational Guidance.**

As indicated in my letter yesterday, I am writing to let you know that the updated version of the Northern Ireland Dental Operational Guidance (please see attached) has now been released containing significant amendments. The guidance has been re-named to reflect the main IPC guidance: *Seasonal Respiratory Infections and COVID-19: General Dental Services - Operational Guidance*.

As with previous iterations of the guidance, these amendments have been made in conjunction with the GDS Re-establishment Group, which is led by HSCB and has representation from Trusts, DoH and BDA. Those elements of the guidance that are new or have been modified since the previous version are **highlighted in yellow**.

Amendments to the Northern Ireland Operational Guidance have been made in light of the release of a dental appendix to the main UK Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance on 23 November 2021. In this way, a consistent approach to IPC in the dental setting will be maintained across the UK, although there are differences in the Covid-19 Test and Trace Strategies across the four devolved countries.

The main elements of the guidance that have been updated are:

- The screening of patients, prior to their appointment and re-checked upon arrival, using screening questions. An example is included in the guidance.
- Based on screening and risk assessment, the patient should be assigned to either the respiratory pathway or non-respiratory pathway
- The optional and voluntary use of LFDs prior to treatment on the non-respiratory pathway

The revised UK IPC guidance adopts the hierarchy of controls framework. Many of the processes and measures described in the hierarchy of controls are well-established features, already successfully adopted by dental practices.

- For patients on the non-respiratory pathway standard IPC measures apply
- For patients on the respiratory pathway transmission based IPC measures as well as standard IPC measures apply
- Fallow times are only required following an AGP on the respiratory pathway
- The implementation of social distancing of 1 metre on the non-respiratory pathway and 2 metres on the respiratory pathway
- The universal use of face masks by staff
- The universal use of face masks by patients on the respiratory pathway and face coverings by patients on the non-respiratory pathway

The guidance sets out the minimum PPE requirements for the safe management of patients on each pathway. There is flexibility for staff to increase PPE levels if they wish to according to local risk assessments

I wish to thank the GDS Re-establishment Group for the time and effort they have taken to update this guidance, and particularly William Priestly for his significant input. This is greatly appreciated.

As advised, **this guidance is effective from 3 January 2022.**

Yours sincerely

*Caroline Lappin*

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**Enc. Seasonal Respiratory Infections and COVID-19: General Dental Services - Operational Guidance.**