

## THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH

By Carol Van Aernam, RDH, BA

*Carol lives on, in this her final article...*

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**Note:** COVID-19 care guidelines and regulations are changing frequently at both the federal and state levels. The responses and expert advice below are basic infection control precautions but always be sure to check the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and [www.coronavirus.iowa.gov](http://www.coronavirus.iowa.gov) for the most up to date information.

**Question 1:** What do we know about oral hygiene and the Covid-19 virus?

**Answer:** As of this date (June 2020) we do not have research or studies on the effect of good oral hygiene and the Covid-19 Virus. We do have studies about similar viruses, (Cold, flu, and rhino viruses). That, in turn, gives us information about the importance of good oral hygiene dealing with viruses.

**Question 2:** Is there a relationship between coronavirus and oral health?

**Answer.** The bacteria associated with Periodontal Disease and Gingivitis have an immune-suppression effect that increases our susceptibility to the cold and flu viruses like influenza and rhinovirus. If we aspirate bacteria and viruses into our lungs it can affect our respiratory health and increase the risk for pneumonia. Covid-19 has significant respiratory effects, and increases the risk for pneumonia. Coupled with poor oral health, this could significantly impact the symptoms associated with Covid-19. Maintaining the health of the lungs is of utmost importance.

If your immune system is weak or you have a chronic disease such as heart disease, asthma, lung disease or diabetes, it is important to have a healthy mouth to protect your immune system and enable your body to protect you and those you serve.

**Question 3:** What do I need to do to protect myself and those I serve while providing or assisting with all types of oral care?

**Answer:**

- Always follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and organization guidelines and regulations to prevent cross contamination and infection.
- Wear a face mask and gloves.
- Wear goggles, glasses or face shield to protect your eyes from splatter.
- Wear a gown to provide cares and change when soiled or per organization regulations.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after giving oral care or if contaminated. Remove gloves when completed. Or use a hand sanitizer before and after providing oral care or if contaminated during oral care.

**Question 4:** What do I need to do to provide a healthy mouth for those I serve?

**Answer:**

- Brush teeth at least twice daily for approximately 2 minutes to reduce the plaque, bacteria and viruses in the mouth to keep it healthy and protect the rest of the body.
- Use Dental floss, interdental brushes or other interdental devices if possible. This helps to remove the plaque from places where it is hard for the toothbrush to reach.
- Use a mouth rinse that can kill both disease causing germs and deliver fluoride to strengthen the teeth.
- Brush the tongue to reduce the bacteria and viruses in the mouth.
- Rinse the toothbrush out after each use and air-dry. Replace it if the person served is ill from a cold, flu or other viral diseases.

**Question 5:** What about dentures, partials or other dental appliances?

**Answer:** Wash your hands (before and after) or wear gloves before handling dentures, partials or other appliances. They can harbor bacteria and viruses, (including Covid-19) and become aspirated into the lungs, increasing the risk for getting pneumonia. Removing them at night and scrubbing with a denture brush and placing them in a cup with a denture cleaner is particularly important to reduce aspiration into the lungs.

### For additional information:

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