

Indiana Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon ISOMS

Date: April 16, 2020

To: To the Honorable Governor of the State of Indiana, Mr. Eric Holcomb.
To the Honorable Lieutenant Governor, Mrs. Suzanne Crouch.

From: Raymond Lee, DDS: President of ISOMS board

Re: Reopening of Oral Surgery and Dental Offices, allowing for a return of non-essential dental treatment.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Indiana Society of Oral Maxillofacial Surgeons (ISOMS), which is a constituent society under the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), and its associated members. We are a specialty of dentistry, which bridges the gap between dentistry and medicine. However, as dentists, we also fall under the guidance of the American Dental Association (ADA) and the Indiana Dental Association (IDA).

On March 18th, the State of Indiana directed all health care providers, including Indiana's dental community, to cancel all non-essential procedures and surgeries. All dental offices were essentially shut down overnight, only remaining open to answer calls from patients in pain or with infection, fitting the definition of emergency treatment under the ADA guidelines. This was done in an effort to increase PPE for healthcare workers, working in hospitals and ER's, to keep patients out of hospital E.R.s, so they may focus on the greater task at hand, which was to treat coronavirus patients. However, as PPE has become more available, with the increased production, importation of equipment and supplies, and the expansion of the ability to disinfect masks and other protective gear, the order to delay these important health care procedures should be lifted.

Impact on Oral Surgery Practices and Dentistry:

We understand that coronavirus has impacted all Hoosiers and small businesses in the state, some more so than others. However, we believe oral surgery and dentistry has been hardest hit by the pandemic. A recent American Dental Association survey of dentists shows, a 95% decrease in total patient volume over the last 4 weeks. Working from home is not an option for oral surgeons/dentists and their staff, who perform procedures that must be done in person. Because many offices have remained open to treat and care for dental emergencies, which then reduces patients seeking care and treatment at our hospitals and ERs, we still incur significant overhead expenses – including maintaining equipment and at least some staff – while generating next to no revenue. This essentially, is putting most dentists at risk of insolvency.

There are ~110 oral surgeons that belong to the AAOMS/ISOMS and ~ 4,300 licensed dentists in Indiana, with ~ 21,500 Hoosiers work in dental offices across the state. The state of Indiana cannot allow the destruction of the dental delivery system. As soon as possible, these oral surgery and dental offices, the restriction on non-essential dental treatment must be lifted.

Impact on Dental Patients and all Hoosiers:

Moreover, the Order to delay non-emergency dental care is having a negative impact on Hoosiers oral and overall health. For example,

- Delay in prevention, diagnosis and treatment of dental disease will lead to more invasive and expensive procedure and oral surgery.
- Normally, approximately three Hoosiers are diagnosed with oral cancer every day, most of the time detection is through regular visits to the dentist. Delay in diagnosing oral cancer can lead to catastrophic consequences for the patient resulting greater morbidity and mortality
- Untreated diseases of the oral cavity have been associated with several systemic health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and pregnancy complications.

Lifting the Order delaying these procedures will allow dentists to diagnose and treat important dental conditions that will preserve Hoosiers oral and overall health.

Solution: Opening Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and Dental Practices enabling us to provide full dental care and treatment:

By allowing oral surgeons and dentists to reopen their practices to provide the full scope of necessary treatment, these offices will be able to restore their employees and provide the necessary oral health services to Hoosiers in need. In opening dental practices, Indiana's dentists are prepared to take special precautions to limit patient interactions with each other and potential exposure to coronavirus, including having a detailed questionnaire/conversation before scheduling appointments, taking the temperature of the patient at the outset, staggering patient appointments to reduce waiting room exposure and having patients wait in their cars instead of waiting areas (with text or call notification when the operator is ready for their treatment). Oral Surgeons and dentists will also secure the equipment and supplies necessary to provide treatment in a safe and efficient environment for their staff and patients.

Additional Policy Initiatives for Dental Offices:

In addition to opening oral surgery and dental offices, we desperately need state assistance and policy initiatives to recover from this financial shock and to assist patients. This need could be met by the following public policy initiatives:

- The State should provide a state income tax credit of up to \$5,000 for every dentist/owner in Indiana (Every dental practice has lost far more than that during this crisis).

- The State should provide grants and low interest loans to dentists, so they can get through the shutdown and reopen after the crisis. Given the \$2 billion surplus, the State currently has, this would be of great assistance to these offices and reassure their ability to get back to work and assist in economic recovery.
- Oral Surgeons and Dentists should be authorized to administer newly developed tests to determine whether a person has developed COVID 19 antibodies. Dental offices exist in every community throughout the state and such serology testing will be crucial to quickly reopening the economy and will help determine whether patients are eligible to donate plasma for COVID 19 treatment.

Conclusion:

The oral surgery and dental community of Indiana understands the gravity of the situation related to the coronavirus pandemic and we have done our part to assist in the state's efforts, to limit the spread and flatten the curve. We are aware and understand that this pandemic is an evolving situation and will require adjustments based off clinical and scientific data. However, at this point, the number of new cases and deaths have dropped off and the curve appears to be flattening. It is very unlikely the virus will be completely eradicated in the next several months and it is unsustainable for any business to remain closed for such an extended period. Now, as Indiana looks to restart its economy, Indiana's oral surgeons and dentists are prepared and asking to go back to work in order to generate economic activity, restore their employees, and most importantly, provide Hoosiers the oral health services they need.