

A Message To Patients Regarding Returning To Ambulatory Care With Your Physician, Dentist And Other Health Professionals

Black Coalition Against COVCID, DC Medical Society,
The Medico-Chirurgical Society, DC Dental Society, and
The Robert T. Freeman Dental Society

As physicians and dentists in Washington D.C., our concern is the health and welfare of all those living in our city, and especially those who are living with chronic illnesses and other health challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in social isolation, as well as significant interruptions to healthcare providers' ability to give our patients the care and services they need. As a result, many people may be experiencing a worsening of their health status. For older people and those with health conditions like diabetes, heart or lung disease, exposure to the COVID-19 virus can be deadly. Therefore, while our city should not relax its vigil in the fight against this virus, we have progressed to a stage that allows patients to carefully start going back to their physicians, dentists, and hospitals.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), patients with these priority conditions and symptoms should be sure to check in with their health provider: signs/symptoms of stroke or heart attack; dental emergencies; abdominal pain; treatment for certain cancer diagnoses; and well-child visits for newborns.

Additionally, people should also seek care for issues such as childhood vaccinations; change in symptoms for chronic medical conditions; injuries; certain surgeries that were previously planned; and physical or occupational therapy.

What follows is our guidance on how your visit can be accomplished carefully and responsibly, what you should expect from your health professionals and facilities, and what you should do to protect yourself and your care providers.

- Whenever possible and appropriate for your needs, many of us provide an option for telephonic or video visits, which is called “Telehealth.” These tools, when used appropriately, can be safely employed to manage a wide range of health needs without having to come into the office. So, don’t be surprised if this option is offered to you when you schedule your appointment. You can find more information about Telemedicine and Teledentistry at <https://www.healthit.gov/faq/what-telehealth-how-telehealth-different-telemedicine>.
- When you schedule your visit, expect that you will be asked whether you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 infection within the last 14 days, and whether you are showing any of the signs of a possible infection, so that your care provider will know what special precautions need to be taken to protect you, the office staff and any other patients who may be in the clinic. To remind you, these are the symptoms that you should be honest in reporting: fever or chills; cough; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; fatigue; muscle or body aches; headache, new loss of taste or smell; sore throat; congestion or runny nose; nausea or vomiting; diarrhea; or otherwise feeling unwell. Remember, reporting these symptoms will not prevent your visit; however, it will allow the office to take the special precautions necessary to make your visit safer for you and others.
- When you visit your health professional’s office, expect that you will be required to wear your mask and that your temperature will be taken immediately upon entry.
- If possible, when reporting for your appointment, ask to be allowed to wait in your car until you are called. If you do wait in the waiting area, expect that your time there will be minimal, that the chairs will be spaced at least six feet apart, and that very few people will be waiting with you. Note that bringing someone with you, which is a good idea for many types of patients during normal times, should be limited to only when absolutely necessary; and, they too, must go through the same symptom screening process as you do.
- Expect that people with possible COVID-19 infection will be placed in a separate area from those without COVID-19 symptoms.

- Be aware that, in the District, all healthcare providers are told to change personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and masks, or at the very least thoroughly clean PPE, between each patient encounter. Any staff person showing signs of illness are not permitted to report to work or should be sent home immediately. Also, health care offices are required to undergo regular deep cleaning. Please speak up and ask or say something if you suspect any of these are not being followed, or if you have a concern.
- Expect that toys, magazines, and other frequently touched objects that cannot be regularly cleaned or disinfected will have been removed from the waiting area.
- Expect that tissues, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, soap at sinks, and trash cans will be conveniently available.
- Expect that your care provider may increase your prescription medication refills to a 90-day supply if allowed and as appropriate to your clinical status, just in case we have to resume social isolation mandates. They should contact the pharmacy to ensure this can be filled.

In addition, for dental visits, you should also expect that:

- Your professional will wear eye protection (goggles, protective eyewear with solid side shields, or a full-face shield), and gloves. A gown should be worn during procedures likely to generate splashing or spattering of blood or other body fluids.
- They will avoid aerosol-generating procedures whenever possible. If such procedures are necessary, the professional will wear an N95 or KN95 respirator, instead of a mask, in addition to other precautions noted above. You should feel free to ask your dentist about these precautions.

This is definitely not the time to relax our vigil against the COVID-19 pandemic. Please continue to always wear a mask or face covering every time you go outdoors among others, practice physical distancing and frequent hand washing/sanitizing. It is equally important that you actively

work with your health professional to maintain your health as we safely reopen the city.