



# BRAUN: Dentists adapt to protect staff, patients against COVID-19

Liz Braun  
More from Liz Braun

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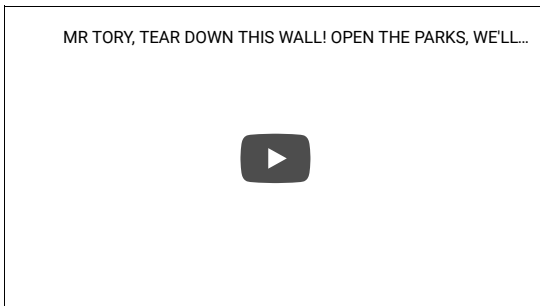
Dentist working with a patient. Stock photo / Getty Images

The person in the hazmat suit? That's your dentist.

Expect plenty of protective gear, hand sanitizer, glass shielding and futuristic air purifiers the next time you visit his or her office.

Safety issues — for you and the dentist — will make getting your teeth cleaned or fixed a bit more complicated than in the past.

Today's dentistry is increasingly challenging, says veteran professional Dr. Rob Cappell, and it doesn't help that each province seems to be making its own rules about coping with COVID-19.



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Cappell's offices — Dentistry in Motion in the Lawrence-Allen Centre — are being refitted for health and safety reasons while he waits for the green light to fully open his practice again. (Full disclosure: Cappell is my dentist. Thank God.)

The issue in the dentist's office is aerosols, the airborne microscopic droplets that linger a while, can be inhaled (or contaminate surfaces) and bring with them the danger of disease transmission.

Aerosols are released in almost every element of dental work, including cleaning. Ultrasonic scalers and high speed drills are obvious culprits, but many other instruments in the dentist's (or hygienist's) tool kit create aerosols.

Long before COVID-19, dentists had to guard against aerosols, knowing their work leaves them open to catching a cold, the flu, pneumonia or worse from a patient.

So COVID-19 will be more of the same, only more so.

"As much as possible, we're going to touchless dentistry," Cappell said.

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Henceforward, some staff in his dental office will be protected top to toe with PPE, while the frontline at reception will sit behind a glass panel.

"Staff need a head cover now," Cappell said. "If you're working with aerosols, you'll need a face shield, like welders wear, and a mask as well, goggles, two pairs of gloves, a gown, and booties."

His office will have a donning and doffing station for personal protective equipment.



**Dr. Rob Cappell, of Dentistry in Motion in the Lawrence-Allen Centre.** Profile photo / Whatclinic.com

Every dental office in his practice is now an isolated space equipped with a complex Jade air purifier. The air cleaners have to operate full throttle between patients for a certain period of time, so that every patient enters a clean office; some provinces say an hour wait time between patients is optimal, some say three hours, and some have no guidelines.

"The point is, the aerosols have to be gone," Cappell said.

Dentists will probably move to some virtual visits, as doctors have done already; the dentist's great advantage is that he works on one specific area only and has pictures, complex X-Rays and a detailed history of every patient's mouth in his charts.

For office visits, patients will also have new protocols to follow. Expect day-of health checks and temperature readings before setting foot in the office; there will be hand sanitizer and gloves (and possibly booties) for all.



Just like the grocery store, the dental office is now a place where you go alone. They can no longer welcome your kids or anyone else who isn't there to see the dentist or hygienist.

Once Cappell is ready to work on a patient, everything else must be in place in the carefully sterilized operator.

"Once the patient, my assistant and I are in the room and the door is shut, nobody can come in or out," he said.

Not every dentist will be this scrupulous, perhaps, but Cappell intends to do whatever it takes.

"You have to feel safe when you're here," he said. "I want my staff and my patients to be safe. That's the objective."

[lbrown@postmedia.com](mailto:lbrown@postmedia.com)

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