

# Infectious Smiles

Focus on Anti-infectives



<https://www.cda.org/news-events/managing-patients-with-hiv>

## Managing patients with HIV

**“ In a case reported to TDIC’s Risk Management Advice Line, a dentist called to confirm whether he followed the right protocol when refusing to treat a patient with HIV. In this case, a new patient presented to his office for an emergency visit, requesting an extraction. The patient revealed he was HIV positive. The dentist advised to consult with his physician prior to receiving treatment to discuss whether the extraction would impact the patient’s overall physical health.**

**The patient informed the dentist that he was not under the care of a physician and he did not agree with the dentist’s requirement to contact a physician.**

**The dentist explained that he could not complete the extraction without the necessary diagnostic information. The patient became upset and stated he felt he was being discriminated against because of his HIV status. He left and warned that the dentist would be hearing from his attorney. “**

Luckily, the case went nowhere, as the dentist followed the appropriate protocol of requiring an exam and X-ray, a standard procedure regardless of HIV status. Consulting a patient’s physician is also a standard protocol if the patient is under the care of a physician or is taking medication that may potentially impact dental treatment.<sup>1</sup>

In the early days of dentistry, not much was known about the spread of the disease HIV.<sup>1</sup> As knowledge of bacteria and viruses expanded, so did the protocols for preventing their transmission in health care settings. Unfortunately, there is still a great misunderstanding about the spread of one of the most feared diseases — HIV.<sup>1</sup>

**“ Unlike the flu or common cold, there is little, if any, risk of spreading the HIV virus in the dental setting if appropriate precautions are taken.<sup>1</sup> “**

It should be noted that patients are not required by law to disclose HIV status, nor are practitioners prohibited from asking. However, dentists should remind patients that various medicines, including those used to manage HIV, can affect oral health and cause negative interactions. Therefore, consulting with the patient’s physician may be required and failing to ask the question may be considered practicing below the standard of care.

Whether a patient is HIV positive, dentists should always be reminded to use standard infection control precautions.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, the patient may not be aware that he or she is HIV positive; and in others, the patient chooses not to mark it on the medical history form out of fear of discrimination.

A patient's HIV status bears special confidentiality. Be sure not to release this information unless you have express written permission from the patient or the patient's legal representative. Assuming all patients are infectious and employing standard infection precautions can avert a possible liability claim.<sup>1</sup>

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention details the minimum infection prevention practices that apply to patient care, both for blood-borne and airborne pathogens. Educating staff on these pathogens and providing training on preventing their transmission is critical.

**The standard precautions include the following:**

1. Hand hygiene
2. Personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks and eyewear
3. Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette
4. Sharps safety
5. Safe injection practices
6. Sterile instruments and devices
7. Clean and disinfected environmental surfaces

**Reference:**

1. <https://www.cda.org/news-events/managing-patients-with-hiv>