

Updated 24th July 2020

**Writtle Dental Practice COVID-19 Return to Work Policy for Our Patients**

This policy has been created based on multiple updated sources from within the dental and medical professions including SDCEP (Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Program) and the FGDP (Faculty of General Dental Practitioners). It outlines modifications to our normal procedures that we intend to employ once dental practices can be reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic peak of infection has subsided.

It is not known at this time whether these procedures are temporary or whether they will become a permanent feature of the way dental practices must be run to ensure patient and staff safety in the future. The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic is continuously being evaluated and studied and policies and recommendations are likely to change in line with new scientific evidence over time.

We would like to thank all of our patients for their patience and forbearance during this long period of practice closure and for their understanding and cooperation whilst we implement new measures at the practice.

**Provisional timetable**

Following the recent government announcement, it is our intention for all staff members to return to work as soon as possible after the 8th June as is reasonably practicable, taking into account the establishment of enhanced cross-infection procedures and the availability of the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE). The Writtle Dental Practice team will spend the next 2 weeks preparing the practice for re-opening and training in our new policies and protocols before patients return to the practice. The safety of our patients and team members is of paramount importance. We have published our return to work letter on our website and Facebook page to keep our patients as up to date as possible regarding the resumption of our services.

**Patient communication before reopening**

We would of course like to continue providing the necessary dental care to all of our patients in the safest possible environment. We therefore respectfully request your full cooperation with any new or modified procedures at the practice.

Our clinicians and reception staff will be contacting patients with ongoing treatment and confirming appointments to continue with current courses of treatment during June.

Our patients with urgent, ongoing or delayed courses of treatment will be prioritised in the first few weeks of opening.

**New measures at Writtle Dental Practice to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission**

Our normal cross-infection control protocols at Writtle Dental Practice against all previously known pathogens are already woven into all clinical activity carried out at the practice. It should be remembered that the dental practice is already a very clean environment compared to public areas and it is not possible for us to control sources of infection outside the dental practice.

There have been multiple suggestions from many sources as to how the risk of transmission of COVID-19 can be reduced in a dental clinical environment. Some of these are straightforward and some of these are patently impractical when carrying out fine and detailed dental procedures.

We have collectively evaluated all of these and feel that the following measures will reduce risk to an acceptable level at the practice. Please be assured that all of our clinical staff will be complying with strict infection control measures also.

**Before attending the practice**

• Please use your own restroom facilities at home before you leave to attend for your appointment. Our restroom will be closed.

• Please brush your teeth at home before you attend.

• Please attend on your own where possible and wear a mask or cloth face covering.

• Please avoid bringing coats, bags and jackets inside. These pose an infection control risk. Keep them securely in your car.

• Please complete any forms you have been asked to ahead of your visit with us. You may access these by downloading these from our website and emailing them back to us or bringing the printed copies with you. If you are unable to do this please let our reception team know in advance and they will pre fill as much information as they can to shorten any time you need to spend in the reception area. Please bring your own pen (and reading glasses if necessary) to complete these forms at the practice.

•Accompanying persons will be asked to wait outside or in their car. An exception will be made for carers/translators and parents who will need to pass screening and should bring a cloth face covering if they are to enter the practice with you.

• We will carry out pre-attendance COVID-19 screening over the phone before your next appointment. This is to keep all our patients and staff as safe as possible.

Our staff will contact you before you attend for an appointment. If we feel that you are a medium to high risk of having possibly been infected by COVID-19, even if you are asymptomatic, we will respectfully request for you to delay booking any appointments with us for at least one month.

**Please note: we will make provisions for patients with COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19 and those who are self-isolating so that they may access emergency treatment if required.**

• We would recommend that patients in high-risk (vulnerable) and extremely high-risk (shielding) groups delay non-essential dental treatment for as long as possible until the trend of the pandemic becomes clear. To find out whether you are in the vulnerable or shielding group please contact your GP if we are unable to determine this.

• In view of the potential seriousness of COVID-19, please note that we will try to ensure that the pre-attendance screening is completed at least 3 days before your appointment. If we are unable to contact you for assessment of your current condition, we will unfortunately have to cancel your appointment and inform you by email or phone.

• Patients will be informed that they must wait outside and not enter the building until they receive a call to say we are ready for them.

• Writtle Dental Practice normally operates a pay as you go policy for treatment phases and we would request that payment is made over the phone prior to your appointment. This reduces the requirement for unnecessary contact or use of card terminals at reception.

• When travelling to the practice, we would recommend that you limit your close contact with other members of the public as far as possible. If you are able to drive or be driven and picked up by somebody with whom you live, this would be ideal. Alternatively, we would recommend coming to the practice in a taxi, ideally a partitioned cab so that you are separated from the driver. Please book cabs in advance as there may be a shortage due to this reason when businesses reopen.

**Arriving at the practice**

We would like to eliminate waiting times in reception as much as possible so that you are not in close proximity to other patients. Accordingly, appointments will be staggered so that patients do not arrive or leave at the same time as each other as far as we are able to manage.

Please arrive at the practice a few minutes before your appointment time but stay in your car or at a reasonable distance from the building and await further instructions. Please do not bring anyone with you if possible. The door will be locked until we are ready to receive you.

When you enter the practice, we will welcome you and repeat the screening questions. Thoroughly rub your hands for 30 seconds with the antiseptic hand sanitiser that will be provided.

If all is well, we will direct you straight to the surgery.

We will provide you with a large tissue at the start of your treatment for you to sneeze/cough into if required. Please follow the “Catch It, Bin It, Kill It” respiratory hygiene procedures.

Remember our restroom facilities will be closed. If it is absolutely necessary to use the restroom, please let reception know and do your best to ensure that you leave the facilities as you would expect to find them. The restroom will be then be disinfected between uses and we would respectfully ask that you make our team’s task easier by being considerate.

**Additional Information and Post Visit Advice**

* Please use the hand sanitiser provided after your appointment.
* We will endeavour to book your next appointment in surgery however if this was not been possible, please phone us at your convenience to book any follow up appointments you may need.
* We would request that payment is made by phone prior to or immediately after your appointment. This reduces the requirement for unnecessary contact or use of card terminals at reception.
* We advise you wash your hands and face for 30 seconds immediately upon your return home and advise you to change into fresh clothes and launder the other items as soon as possible.

**Practice procedures**

* The Writtle Dental Practice team have spent time critically looking at every aspect of the practice with a view to removing all non-essential items in the open to reduce the number of objects that may act as ‘fomites’ (surfaces on which microorganisms may reside and can potentially be the cause of cross infection). You will find that the practice may appear quite bare when you attend.
* All clinical and common areas including door handles and surfaces will be regularly disinfected at set times using alcohol wipes (96% alcohol) which is potently viricidal against COVID-19 and other microorganisms and can be used safely on all work surfaces. We have been using Alpron, which is a powerful disinfectant for many years in dental chair waterlines to ensure no microorganisms harbour anywhere.
* We will be providing a 30-60 minute buffer period (after certain procedures which may change as guidelines are updated) before using the same treatment room to allow additional time for decontamination procedures, allow for any treatment overruns and allow preparation time for the next patient so that they do not need to wait in the reception area. We will be alternating between both available fully equipped treatment rooms for this purpose.

**Dental procedures**

* All dental staff will be upgrading their personal protective equipment in line with current recommendations and evidence including FFP2 and FFP3 masks, visors and protective clothing as appropriate. We apologise in advance for the necessary reduction in social interaction that this will necessitate. Whilst our attire may make us appear impersonal and distant, please be assured we are still the same friendly team underneath it all!
* We are especially mindful that most dental treatments are aerosol-generating procedures (AGP’s). It is almost impossible for us to carry out meaningful dental procedures without generation of some level of aerosol. Aerosol suspended in the air is a potential source of infection which we wish to keep to a minimum. Currently the dental literature suggests:
* Our use of our normal high-volume suction reduces the majority of aerosol production by 90-98%.
* The increased use of dental rubber dam further reduces bio-aerosols by 30 to 90%.
* Our regular facemasks filter approximately 60% of remaining airborne particles.
* FFP2 and FFP3 masks filter 94% and 99% respectively of airborne particles in both directions (patient to clinician and clinician to patient). We therefore feel that our normal dental procedures can be carried out with minimal risk with use of high-volume suction, dental dam and FFP2 and, in high aerosol generating procedures such as hygienist visit for periodontal treatment, FFP2/FFP3 masks as appropriate.
* We are also considering the procurement of viricidal air filtration and purification systems for the surgeries and the reception area to further reduce aerosol risk. We are waiting to see if there is sufficient evidence to support the benefit of these systems.
* Due to the recent rapid rise in the demand of specialist PPE, the costs have increased several times to what they were pre-COVID (for some items 3-10 times more!) We have done our best to absorb some of these increases; however, we have had to make an upward adjustment to some of our fees. We will review our fees as prices of PPE start to return to ‘normal’ levels in the future.

**Summary**

For the vast majority of our patients we will likely be able to provide normal dental care in as normal an environment as possible while bearing in mind our responsibilities to mitigate risks of infection spread as far as is practically possible.

We look forward to welcoming you back at Writtle Dental Practice! This policy will be constantly reviewed and updated as necessitated by circumstances over time. If you have any questions regarding this policy or about your dental care at Writtle Dental Practice please do not hesitate to contact us on reception@writtledentalpractice.co.uk