

Dear Colleague,

Treatment of dental patients who are not yet showing symptoms of flu but are infected

Dentists have raised concerns that patients who are about to become ill with flu but are not yet symptomatic may present a risk of infection for dental teams.

I have asked one of our local Consultants in Communicable Disease working for the Health Protection Agency about this. He has advised that although it is possible to recover virus from pro-dromal patients, the level of virus shedding in these patients is considerably lower than in patients who have clear flu symptoms. He advises that wearing of eye protection, ordinary surgical masks (not the FFP2 or FFP3 masks) and gloves will provide good protection for dental teams who are treating patients in whom flu symptoms have not yet become apparent. This is obviously already good practice for dental teams.

Reassuringly, this advice is the same as that given to Doctors and their staff who are taking throat swabs in both asymptomatic and symptomatic flu patients. Raising an aerosol is obviously a risk in these patients because many people cough as they have this sort of specimen taken.

I have asked that this issue is raised centrally to get some more definitive advice added to that already available to you in the documents which have been circulated. This may take some time, so in the interim I would encourage you to follow this local advice and continue to be vigilant with regard to normal infection control in your practices and surgeries.

In one of my previous letters I suggested that you display a notice to encourage patients not to attend if they are ill. I have now ordered some printed posters for you to display to discourage patients from attending themselves if they are ill and also to avoid bringing ill relatives and friends with them when they attend the dental surgery. As soon as they arrive I will post them to you.

I hope this advice is helpful.

Yours etc.