



16 July 2015

Dear practitioner

### Your infection control obligations under the National Law

You may be aware of the recent media and public interest in standards of infection control in dental practice.

As regulators of the profession, we are concerned that there has been doubt among registered dental practitioners about these essential standards. As Chair of the Dental Board of Australia (the National Board) and President of the Dental Council of NSW (the NSW Council), we are now reminding you of your infection control obligations.

We take breaches in infection control standards seriously.

Registered dental practitioners must comply with the National Board's *Guidelines on infection control*. These outline how you can prevent or minimise the risk or spread of infectious diseases in dental practice. They are available on the Board's website at [www.dentalboard.gov.au](http://www.dentalboard.gov.au).

The guidelines list the reference material that you must have access to and comply with, including the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *Australian guidelines for the prevention and control of infection in healthcare*. These are on the NHMRC website at [www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au).

We expect you, as a professional practitioner, to continue to update your knowledge throughout your career and across all areas of your practice, including infection control. We recommend taking a continuing professional development (CPD) course in infection control on a regular basis.

Doing this will help you attain and maintain contemporary knowledge of the required standards, policies and procedures in infection control, and understand the science behind these requirements.

The NSW Dental Council recently suspended the registration of eight dental practitioners and imposed conditions on the practice of a further six practitioners after investigations into a series of patient complaints revealed infection control breaches. There were deficiencies in cleaning, sterilisation and storage of instruments.

As a result of the infection control deficiencies, NSW Health contacted a large number of patients recommending they see their GP to be tested for blood borne viruses. This advice was based on the potential adverse health effects of an undiagnosed blood borne virus infection; the potential that blood borne viruses can be passed unknowingly to others; and the availability of effective treatments for blood borne virus infections.

As a registered dental practitioner you must practise your profession in a way that maintains and enhances public safety. We have put together a checklist you should use to assess your compliance with your obligations under the National Law. You can also use the list to consider what other action you may need to take to improve your knowledge and practice.

### Checklist for practitioners

**Dental Board of Australia**

G.P.O. Box 9958 | Melbourne VIC 3001 | [www.dentalboard.gov.au](http://www.dentalboard.gov.au) | 1300 419 495

- Have you read the Board's guidelines and associated documents? Are you complying with them?
- Does your practice have documented infection control protocols as required in the guidelines? Do you and the staff that you work with, whether or not they are registered, have access to your dental practice's infection control protocols?
- Do you have appropriate facilities where you can wash and dry your hands?
- Do you and your staff have access to the recommended personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, masks and protective eyewear)? Are you all wearing them correctly?
- Are there clearly identified 'clean' and 'dirty' zones in your operative and sterilisation areas?
- Do you have the required cleaning and sterilising equipment (e.g. autoclave and ultrasonic cleaner)? Are they calibrated, validated and tested as required? Do you and your staff know how to test and operate them and record the outputs?
- Is your knowledge of infection control up to date? Do you need to undertake a CPD course in infection control?

We believe that most dental practitioners consistently comply with the guidelines and implement appropriate infection control protocols. However, the consequences for non-compliance with appropriate infection control measures will be significant for you and may be for your patients and the community.

You need to review the Board's registration standards, codes, guidelines and policies regularly and make sure your practice is consistent with these and the *Code of conduct for health practitioners*. These are all available on the Board's website at [www.dentalboard.gov.au](http://www.dentalboard.gov.au).

The Board and the Council hold all registered dental practitioners to account against these standards. NSW practitioners should also familiarise themselves with the work of the NSW Council. More information is on the Council's website at [www.hpca.nsw.gov.au/Dental-Council/Home/Home/default.aspx](http://www.hpca.nsw.gov.au/Dental-Council/Home/Home/default.aspx).

Your professional association and professional indemnity insurance provider may have resources to help you meet your obligations.

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