

Safety Committee Update

The Safety Committee continues to monitor the development of information affecting dental practice safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. To bring members the latest resources and to help practices succeed safely, the Committee has published the newest resources in “Beyond Re-emergence: Pediatric Dentistry Checklist.” Beyond Re-emergence now includes short descriptions of each resource, so viewers can read descriptions of the various resources and articles before committing to open each document. Pediatric dentists needn’t stop their safety journey there; members can also find relevant and useful materials in the AAPD Safety Toolkit.

Anesthesia Accreditation. The AAPD and American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF) have partnered to offer a voluntary sedation/

general anesthesia accreditation model for pediatric dental practices. This program is in response to the commitment by pediatric dentists to continue to provide safe environments in which to treat children, and is designed for practices interested in demonstrating that commitment to their patient families. To learn more about the pediatric dentistry accreditation program, please visit <https://www.aaaasf.org/programs/outpatient-programs/outpatient-pediatric-dentistry/>.

Dental Anesthesia Incident Reporting System (DAIRS). The AAPD has collaborated with the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS) in support of the DAIRS data collection system for anonymous reporting of anesthesia incidents. The DAIRS database launched this fall on the AAOMS website with the goal of identifying and correcting system-related issues that unintentionally promote anesthesia incidents.

N95’s and Respirators...Are You Compliant?

by Joe Castellano, D.D.S.

2020 and COVID-19 brought changes to the way we use PPE in our practices and clinics. What we wear, how we wear it, how we put it on and take it off have all been affected. Masks and respirators definitely fall into this category with some stringent guidelines attached to them. The CDC, OSHA, and the ADA all have put forth guidance on what we should use to cover our faces during the pandemic. But what are those recommendations? What does the CDC recommend? What does OSHA require to be “compliant”? What documentation is required? These are all important questions that many of us may or may not know the answer to. What follows is a review of some key points on respirator use in the workplace to help clarify what is required to maintain compliance.

As stated in the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that “each employer shall furnish to each of their employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees.”¹ Basically, we are required to protect our employees from risk of illness or injury in the workplace. The use of environmental controls, administrative controls and personal protective equipment (PPE) helps employers achieve this safe work environment.

One of the key pieces of PPE we use in the dental setting to create a safe environment is the use of a face mask or respirator. Currently, CDC guidelines recommend that an N95 mask or better be used during aerosolized procedures. They state, “During aerosol generating procedures DHCP should use an N95 respirator or a respirator that offers an equivalent or higher level of protection such as other disposable filter-

ing facepiece respirators, powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRS) or elastomeric respirators.”² Up until the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, we used an appropriate level face mask for the task that was being accomplished, but due to the need for increased protection from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a higher level of respirator has been required. Although many practitioners had difficulty securing these types of respirators at the beginning of the pandemic, thankfully as of late, N95 or its equivalent have been more widely available for use in the dental setting.

The CDC also states that the respirators should be used in conjunction with a comprehensive respiratory control program. Respiratory Control Programs must be in accordance with the OSHA’s Respiratory Protection standard- 29 CF 1910.134.² This standard requires “the employer to develop and implement a written respiratory protection program with required worksite-specific procedures and elements for required respirator use. The program must be administered by a suitably trained program administrator.”³ Some of the elements required in a plan include procedures for selection of respirators, medical evaluations for those required to use respirators, fit testing of respirators, procedures for proper use, cleaning, disinfection and storage of respirators, and training of employees on the proper use of the respirators.³ (The standard contains many more requirements so please refer to it when deciding to create a Respiratory Protection Program for your workplace.)

Fit testing is another requirement of the OSHA Respiratory Protection standard when using a tight-fitting facepiece or other respirators. A “Tight Fitting Facepiece” (TFF) is a respiratory inlet covering that forms a complete seal with the face.³

The N95 respirator is considered a TFF. The standard states that the employer needs to make sure that employees using a TFF pass a qualitative fit test (**QLFT**) or quantitative fit test (**QNFT**) and be fit tested before initial use of the respirator, whenever a different respirator (size, style, model or make) is used, and then annually thereafter.³ There are different companies that can do fit testing. You will need to search your local area to find one that can do the testing required. Most of the testers that I found were testing for industry and not necessarily dedicated to healthcare. Remember when selecting someone to do the fit testing, it is important to make sure that they follow an OSHA-accepted QLFT or QNFT protocol.

Medical evaluations of employees using respirators, including TFF's, are needed as part of the Respiratory Protection Plan.⁴ According to the standard a medical evaluation needs to be done by a physician or other licensed health care professional using the medical questionnaire referenced by the standard's appendix C⁴, or another questionnaire that obtains the same information. A copy should be kept in the employee's file.

A "compliant" respiratory protection program is a detailed document. It is important to use the OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard when developing a program for your workplace to ensure that all the requirements are met. There are also companies that can help you develop a plan. The important thing is to have one in place. Inspections have taken place across the country and there have been employers (yes dentists) that have received fines for not having a Respiratory Protection Plan and/or not being in compliance.

N95 face masks, or their equivalent, have become common place in the dental workplace. As we continue to adapt to their use, the wearer should be aware of the potential physiological impact and the potential for increase in blood CO₂ levels when wearing them. The literature seems to indicate that there are

no severe adverse effects from long term use. There are, however, known physiological effects from extended use of the respirators. These include headache, lightheadedness, increased breathing frequency, increased work of breathing, rash, acne, skin breakdown, and impaired cognition.^{5,6,7} It is important to be able to recognize symptoms if they occur. In most cases, taking a break and removing the respirator, staying hydrated, and practicing good skin care are effective ways to manage the symptoms if they do occur.⁷ Of course, if symptoms are severe, consult your physician.

Respirators have proved effective in the dental setting, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Continued diligence is important as we navigate our way through 2021. Making sure you understand the use of respirators and the compliance that is needed with their use is imperative. The AAPD Safety Committee is committed to being a membership resource to ensure we all keep our workplaces, employees and patients safe.

All the best in 2021!

Resources

Understanding Compliance with OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (**COVID-19**) Pandemic: <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/respiratory-protection-covid19-compliance.pdf>

Q&A: OSHA Guidance for Dental Workplaces: https://success.ada.org/~media/CPS/Files/COVID/QA_OSHA_Guidance_for_Dental_Workplaces

Dental Compliance: <http://dentalcompliance.com/>

Respiratory Protection Program: <https://www.cda.org/Home/Practice/Back-to-Practice/Preparing-your-Practice/respiratory-protection-program>

References

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