

What Dentists Need to Know About Reception Spaces Post-COVID-19

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01 Abstract

AMONG THE MANY THINGS THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED

is the way dental practices need to design and manage reception spaces. Healthcare design strategies and protocols for air quality, materials, seating and protective screens are evolving, and this paper will

help dental offices stay informed about guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Readers are urged to consult the latest dental practice guidance from the CDC and American Dental Association as recommendations continue to evolve.

THE RECEPTION AREA IS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION

RECEPTION SPACES REFLECT THE VALUES AND STYLES OF A DENTAL PRACTICE.

In recent years, these spaces have shifted from mundane to stylish environments with amenities like charging stations, technology bars and refreshment counters. Sliding glass windows separating patients from check-in staff have been replaced with friendlier, more open reception desks. Rows of sterile, identical waiting room chairs have been upgraded to comfortable, diverse seating groups that support a variety of activities and postures. Overall, reception spaces have evolved to support the behavior and activities that today's patients value.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has had an unprecedented impact on human behavior. With government mandates ranging from shelter-in-place orders to physical distancing, the public is emerging from the pandemic with new concerns about health and safety. As dentist offices reopen, practices must reconsider what makes patients and staff feel comfortable and safe, starting in reception.

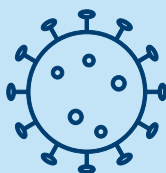
02 Changing Functional & Psychological Needs

THE PANDEMIC HAS PRESENTED A NEW OR EMPHASIZED FOCUS for dental offices in infection control, air quality and physical distancing. Some of these needs are functional, relative to the support of new or modified activities. Others are psychological – what will make patients and providers feel comfortable and safe? While the dental industry awaits further guidance from the ADA, CDC and other regulatory agencies, best practices can be borrowed from healthcare design to help address these needs.

IN RECEPTION, DESIGN HELPS ACCOMPLISH SEVERAL OBJECTIVES.

IT CAN:

Help reduce the spread of infection.



Support physical distancing guidelines.



Increase the perception of safety and comfort.



As dental professionals return to work, they should enter their practices the same way that patients do to evaluate where attention is needed, asking these questions:

1. What do patients see upon entering?
2. Do they know where to go and what to do?
3. Where should signage and supplies be placed?
4. What needs to be decluttered, refinished or replaced?

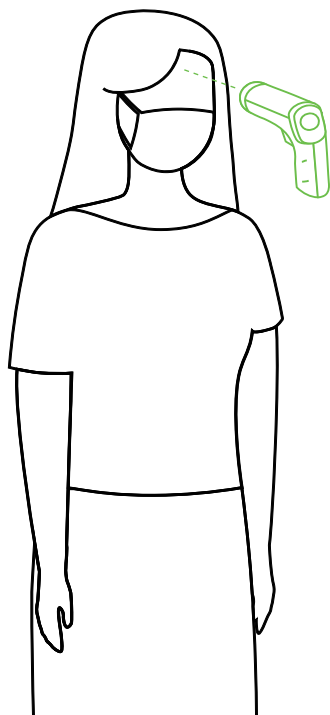


03 Handling New Procedures

PATIENT SCREENING & INFECTION CONTROL

Both the CDC and ADA have instituted COVID-19 screening guidelines for patients arriving at a dental facility.

In addition to completing screening questions over the phone and again upon arrival, patients must also have their temperature taken.



Patients generally enter directly into the reception space of a dental facility, or through a vestibule, so consider setting up a **SCREENING STATION** at or near one of these locations. Be prepared to distribute masks to patients who don't come with their own. Screening stations should be easy to clean and have necessary supplies within reach. They can range from a simple table with appropriate signage to a pre-fabricated screening booth. Commercial furniture manufacturers are quickly bringing both solutions to the market, offering setups that are visually streamlined and easy to decontaminate.

CONSIDER THE PATIENT'S PATH OF TRAVEL TO THE SCREENING LOCATION TO MINIMIZE EXPOSURE.

It's important to have necessary infection prevention and respiratory etiquette supplies readily available and in the right locations as patients enter and move through the practice.

Create **SANITARY STATIONS** with signage instructing proper protocols, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, touchless waste receptacles, and sanitary wipes that patients can use to disinfect surfaces they come into contact with (for their own peace of mind – similar to wiping down the cart handle at the grocery store).



PLASTIC TABLETOP TRAYS are a great way to keep supplies looking tidy and keep alcohol-based sanitizers from destroying the surface finish on furniture.



PROTOCOL SIGNAGE should be prepared professionally and placed in acrylic tabletop or wall-mounted frames.



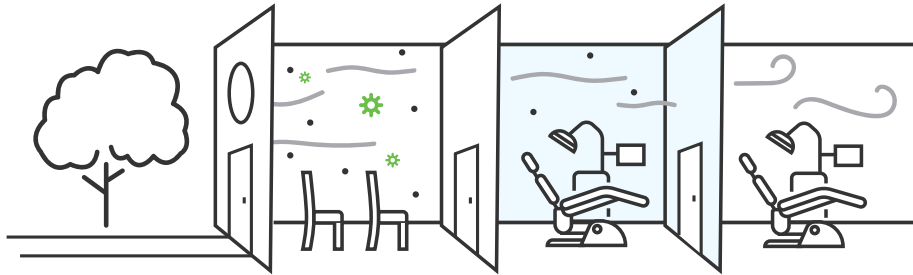
CLEANING PROTOCOLS for your reception space should be determined with routine decontamination of high-touch surfaces throughout the day.

¹"Return to Work Interim Guidance Toolkit," American Dental Association, April 24, 2020.

²"Dental Settings," Center for Disease Control, April 27, 2020. [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/dental-settings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/dental-settings.html)

04 Make Air Quality A Top Priority

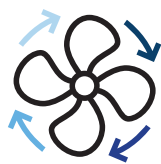
BECAUSE COVID-19 IS AN AIRBORNE INFECTIOUS DISEASE, MANY DENTISTS ARE THINKING ABOUT THE AIR QUALITY OF THEIR PRACTICES.



According to the CDC, dentists should treat known or suspected COVID-19 patients using airborne precautions, which include having a negative pressure isolation room.³ These rooms are constructed with design and ventilation details that prevent contaminated air from spreading from one room to another.

While it is unknown if this type of room will be required for dentists in the future, we do know that *negative air pressure is commonly used in medical settings for infection prevention*. The Facility Guidelines Institute, responsible for developing national hospital design and construction guidance, recommends negative air in healthcare waiting rooms and triage spaces, as well as some types of treatment spaces.⁴

Whether constructing a dental reception space to meet true negative pressure standards determined by ASHRAE, the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers⁵, or introducing an air scrubbing system that uses HEPA filtration or UV light, air quality is a priority for healthcare facilities and should be for dentists as well.



Be sure that your practice's air handling system is cleaned and maintained by an HVAC contractor with commercial design experience. The proper air directionality and filtration should be in place.⁶ In reception, strive for air purification with six to twelve air exchanges per hour.⁷

³"Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings," Center for Disease Control, updated May 18, 2020. Accessed June 11, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>

⁴"Guidelines for design and construction of outpatient facilities," 2018. The Facilities Guidelines Institute.

⁵"ASHRAE Position document on airborne and infectious diseases," ASHRAE, February 5, 2020. [ashrae.org/file%20library/about/position%20documents/airborne-infectious-diseases.pdf](https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/about/position%20documents/airborne-infectious-diseases.pdf)

⁶"Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings," Center for Disease Control, updated May 18, 2020. Accessed June 11, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>

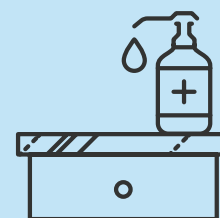
⁷"Guidelines for design and construction of outpatient facilities," 2018. The Facilities Guidelines Institute.

05 Materials in the Reception Area

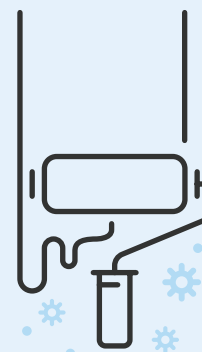
INFECTION CONTROL ISN'T JUST FOR OPERATORIES ANYMORE

WHEN SELECTING MATERIALS FOR THE DENTAL RECEPTION SPACE, it's imperative to consider infection control. Materials used should be proven to withstand EPA-approved cleaning protocols, and should be impervious in nature to avoid moisture penetration that leads to mold and bacteria.

For **COUNTERTOPS**, this means solid surfaces or engineered quartz are best. Some materials are inherently anti-microbial, infused with copper, silver ion, or other infection-fighting additives.

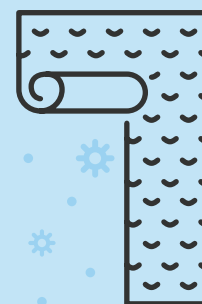


When it comes to the **WALLS**, there's something about new paint that makes a room feel better – and anti-microbial technology can add performance to a fresh coat. Sherwin Williams Paint Shield® goes on just like traditional paint with a roller or brush, but its microbicidal properties kill 99.9% of bacteria within two hours.⁸ Effective for up to four years (before additional coats are required), the product is registered by the EPA and can serve as an additional tool to stop the spread of germs.



COMMERCIAL-GRADE NONWOVEN WALLCOVERINGS, which include vinyl and vinyl alternatives, are a highly cleanable way to add visual interest to the reception space. Unlike residential-grade wallcoverings which are paper-based, commercial nonwoven products are impervious and easy to disinfect.

High-resolution printing technologies can create the impression of rich textures and patterns, with the performance needed to withstand cleaning.

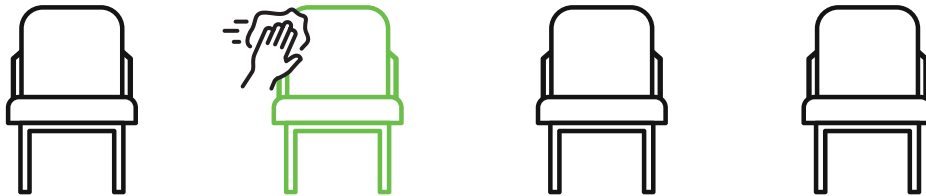


⁸Sherwin Williams (n.d.). Paint Shield Microbicidal Paint. swpaintshield.com/pro/

06 The Bottom Line On Seating

A 2018 study in the *American Journal of Infection Control* concluded that soft surfaces are involved in the spread of microbes throughout health care facilities, with waiting room chairs having the highest concentration of bacteria before disinfection. A proven vehicle of transmission (up to 64%), soft surfaces create an environment where bacteria can persist for extended periods of time⁹.

To help reduce exposure and spread, soft surfaces must be routinely treated with an EPA-registered sanitizer according to the manufacturer's instructions, which typically involve spraying the entire surface until thoroughly wet.



THE RESIDENTIAL-GRADE OR LOW-END COMMERCIAL SEATING THAT MANY DENTAL PRACTICES USE AREN'T DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND THIS TYPE OF CLEANING REGIMEN.

Porous textiles, low-grade vinyl and ineffectively treated wood can break down easily, making them more difficult to clean and more likely to harbor bacteria.

Dentists should opt for commercial-grade health care furniture instead, which can be specified with nonporous / nonwoven textiles, resins, composites, metals and specially-treated woods that can withstand an appropriate disinfection regimen – and even include anti-microbial coatings.



In addition to considering the cleanability of reception space seating, dental practices should reduce the density of furniture to comply with personal distancing recommendations from the CDC¹⁰. The way to accomplish this is with fewer, but higher quality chairs. Many commercial furniture manufacturers have coordinating lines of seating that make it easy to add variety while maintaining visual harmony. Lounge chairs, side chairs, benches, loveseats and plus-sized seating (which is growing in popularity for its practicality) can be combined to create a designer look, even at a safe person-to-person distance. While it's seldom for strangers to share a loveseat, they are appropriate for families.

Mobile screens or dividers can be placed between seating areas for visual separation that may help patients feel more comfortable.

⁹Sexton, J., A. Wilson, H. Sassi, & K. Reynolds. "Tracking and controlling soft surface contamination in health care settings," *AJIC: American Journal of Infection Control*, January 1, 2018, Volume 46, Issue 1.

¹⁰ "Dental Settings," Center for Disease Control, April 27, 2020.

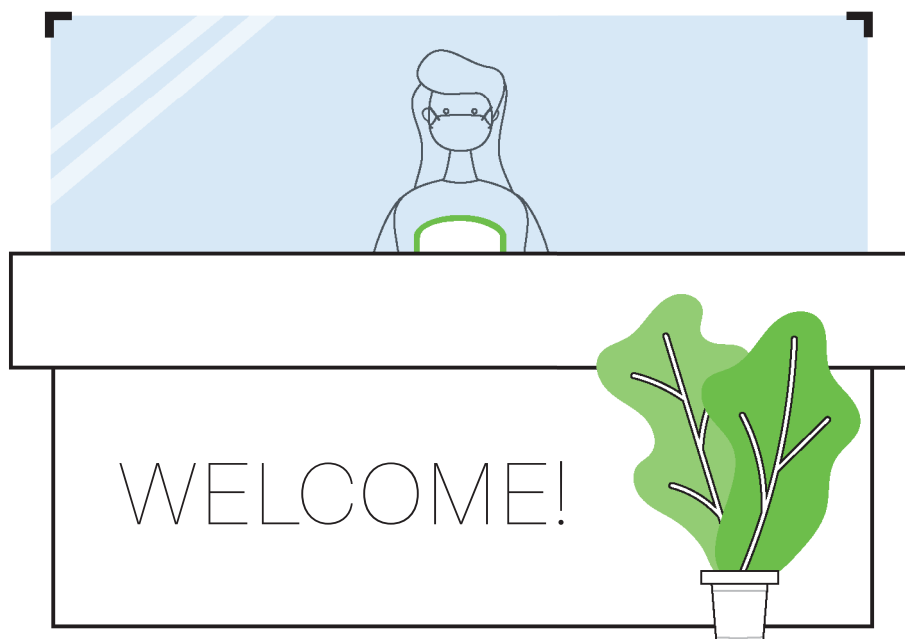
07 The Case for Plexiglass

Because of the potential for airborne transmission of COVID-19, creating barriers has been a common, intuitive response; hospitals have fabricated plexiglass boxes for intubating patients and grocery stores have installed plastic sheaths at checkout counters, to name a few. It has some dentists looking to install glass or acrylic at their reception desks, with either a pass-thru opening or sliding window. This feels counterintuitive to the open desks that have become desirable.

While there's limited research on the effectiveness of such barriers on preventing the spread of airborne infection, the CDC does recommend their use in healthcare settings in their interim guidance for treating patients with known or suspected COVID-19¹¹ and the ADA states that barriers can be considered at the front desk.¹²

They are a visual cue to keep at a distance and may provide a sense of safety, however, they can feel unwelcoming and cause acoustic difficulties when communicating to obtain patient information.

Practices must weigh these pros and cons to decide if glass or plexiglass partitions are right for them. Keep in mind, there are mobile options available for a lower cost than installing a permanent solution. Should a permanent solution be preferred, it's more effective for glass or plexiglass partitions to extend all the way to the ceiling to reduce cross-contamination.



¹¹"Dental Settings," Center for Disease Control, April 27, 2020. [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/dental-settings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/dental-settings.html)

¹²"Return to Work Interim Guidance Toolkit," American Dental Association, April 24, 2020.

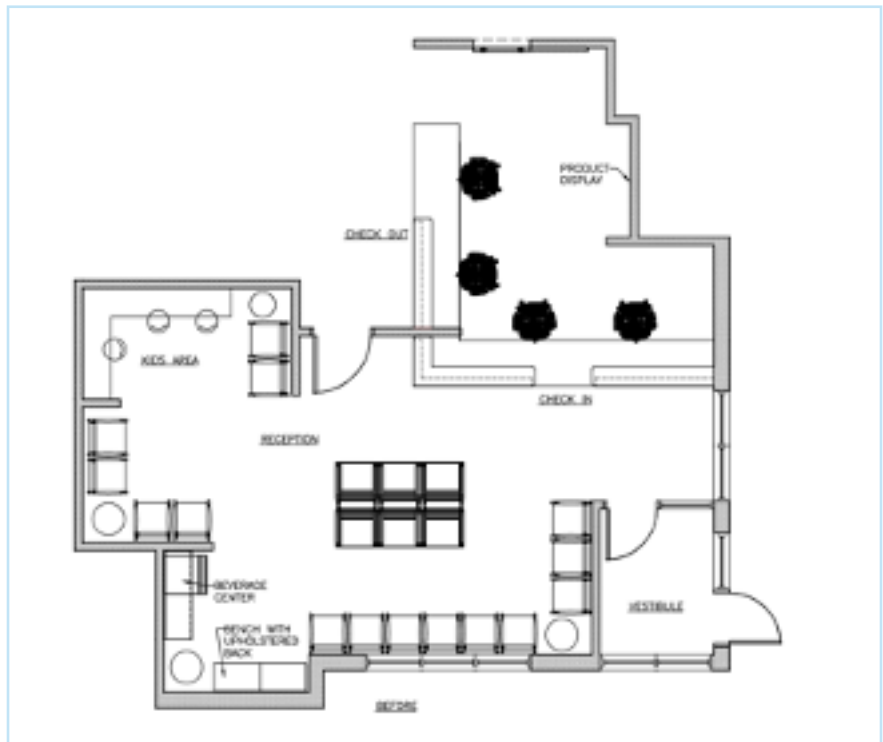
08 Reception Spaces - Reimagined

TYPICAL DENTAL RECEPTION SPACE

Pictured is a common dental reception space, before incorporating provisions for COVID-19.

It contains:

- Check-in desk
- Kids' area
- Beverage center
- Dense seating



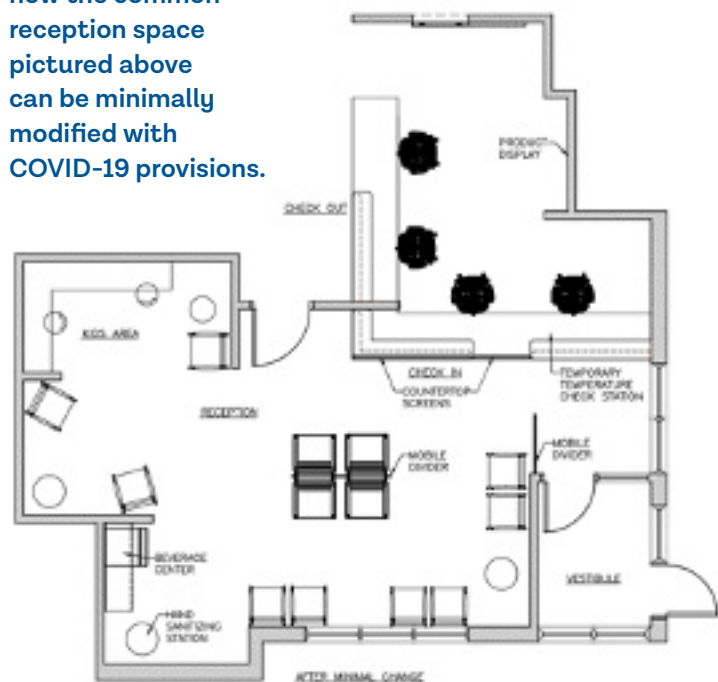
MODIFIED DENTAL RECEPTION SPACE

- MINIMAL SCOPE

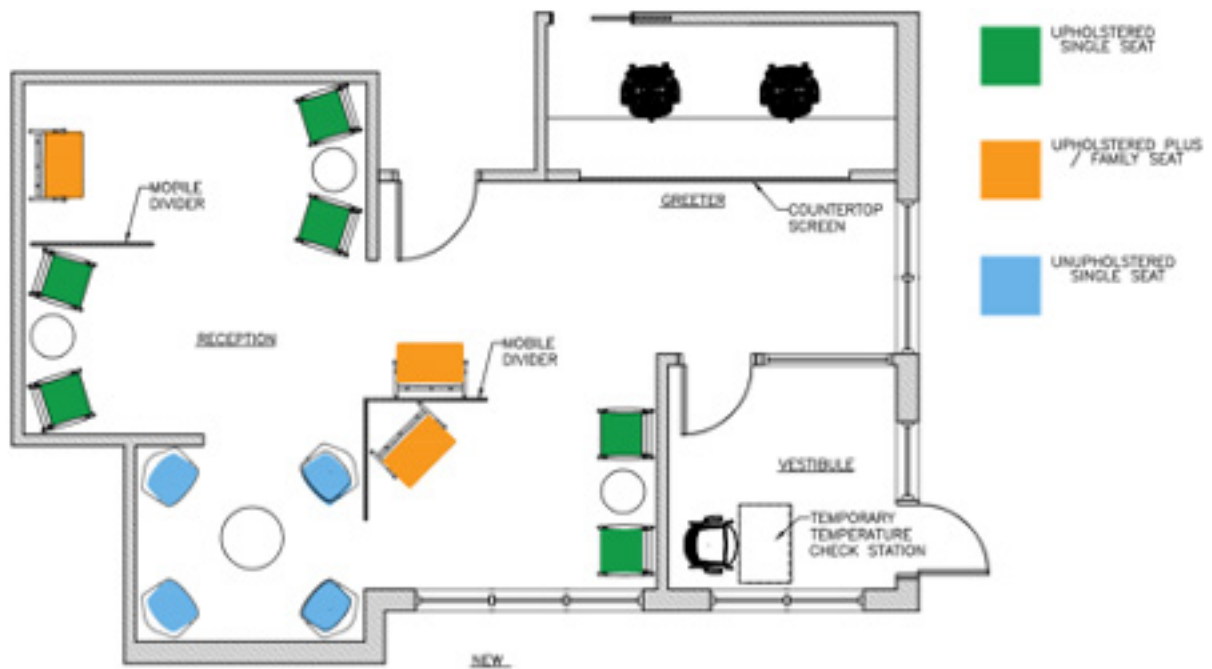
It includes:

- Temporary temperature check station at the front desk
- Temporary countertop screens
- Mobile dividers that can be moved as needed
- Sanitary stations dispersed throughout
- Reduced single-person seating
- Some two-seat groupings for families

This plan illustrates how the common reception space pictured above can be minimally modified with COVID-19 provisions.



09 Reception Spaces - Reimagined (cont'd)



MODIFIED DENTAL RECEPTION SPACE - EXPANDED SCOPE

This plan illustrates how the reception space can be modified more fully, including some spatial rework and new furniture. A temperature check station has been situated inside the vestibule. The reception desk is still utilizing temporary screens and has been completely closed off from the adjacent check-out space to help control airflow. New furniture adds variety and includes impermeable, non-woven upholstered pieces, as well as hard surface, unupholstered pieces. Plus sized seating has been added, and the layout continues to utilize mobile dividers. The beverage center has been completely eliminated, and sanitary stations remain dispersed throughout.

10 Conclusion

IN ADDITION TO ADDRESSING AIR QUALITY, SEATING AND MATERIALS,

there are simple things any practice can do to address health and safety, and improve the look and feel of their reception space when dentistry resumes. Books, magazines, children's toys, and other surface clutter that can harbor germs should be removed. If entertaining your clientele is a priority for your practice, consider digital screens for games that can be disinfected.

If refreshing or adding artwork to reception is on your to-do list, remember that imagery of nature has evidence-based calming effects. It's a great time to support your local art and framing shop while soliciting some professional help on artwork size and placement, which can make all the difference.

Consider adding automation where possible – doors, light switches and temperature controls can be motion or voice-activated. Finally, the most important reception space detail is the smile of your staff behind the desk. They'll be instrumental in making patients feel welcome, safe and cared for – the reasons they chose your practice in the first place!

ABOUT BENCO DENTAL:

BENCO DENTAL IS THE LEADER in cutting-edge dental practice theory, systems and design. They drive dentistry forward through their innovative solutions and caring family culture. Benco is the country's largest family-owned dental distributor with 1,400 associates across the U.S.

*This white paper is one in a series of information on best practices.
For more information, visit us at benco.com.*

Please consult these websites for additional infection control/asepsis resources:
osap.org : ada.org : cdc.gov

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