

## Oral Health and COVID

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In December 2019, a new SARS-CoV-2 virus emerged in Wuhan, China, which has already presented several variants. The world is experiencing a major surge with the omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. Estimates based on modeling by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) suggest that by 17 January 2022 there were 125 million omicron infections per day worldwide, more than ten times the peak of the delta wave in April 2021, as the proportion of asymptomatic or mild cases has increased compared to previous variants of this virus.

Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 usually occurs via the upper respiratory tract, such as the nose, nasopharynx, oral cavity, pharynx, and larynx, with high levels of viral shedding. These characteristics place dental practices as the main risk settings for cross-infection between patients, dentists, and healthcare professionals in the clinical setting, including dental intensive care centers in hospitals. Dentists are among the most exposed professionals to COVID-19. The oral cavity plays an important role in the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 infection within the dental environment, therefore, strict attention should be paid to biosecurity and all means of personal protection to reduce the risk of exposure of dentists and patients [1-4].

This time of pandemic represents an opportunity for the dental field to emphasize prevention. Among the strategies to be used is reduction of some risk factors such as alcohol or tobacco, identification of cariogenic and non-cariogenic foods, promotion of oral health in communities with water fluoridation, application of fluorides, dissemination of brushing techniques, as well an emphasis on good oral hygiene with effective plaque removal performed at least three times a day.

It is already known that the initial manifestations of COVID-19 include some in the oral cavity, such as dry mouth and loss of taste, for which the dentist must be more vigilant and play his role in early identification before other symptoms appear. Dentistry, as an

integral part of the healthcare system, must be prepared to play a more active role in the fight against life-threatening emerging diseases. Protective and preventive measures for both dental care professionals and patients remain necessary and essential both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the risk of infection.

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