

Helping our Westhampton Dentistry patients through the coronavirus crisis

By Dr. William W. Way

As this coronavirus situation has unfolded, all of us – Dr. Way, the Westhampton Dentistry team and our patients – have been faced with questions about how to lead our daily lives while being told we must stay at home. And we've all felt how uncomfortable and frustrating the uncertainty and restrictions can be. My team and I have seen that those feelings are magnified when your health, or that of a family member, is the cause of that uncertainty.

We're now getting numerous questions every day from our dental patients about handling their dental appointments and needs since the stay-at-home measures went into place. We hope that by sharing the answers to the most common questions that you'll feel more confident in dealing with your dental health during this time.

Is Westhampton Dentistry open?

Westhampton Dentistry is open only for dental emergencies. On March 16, the American Dental Association issued guidelines advising dentists nationwide to postpone elective procedures. This was recently extended until April 30, and there is a chance that date may be extended again. To find out, you may call our office at (804) 288-0948. At Westhampton Dentistry, we have chosen to follow the American Dental Association and Virginia Dental Association recommendations. Not only will this help limit exposure to and transmission of the virus for patients and team members, but it also helps preserve and extend the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) that is badly needed in both hospitals and dental offices. Westhampton Dentistry has donated PPE to other healthcare providers in need.

Dental offices **are allowed** to see patients who are having an emergency. A team member at Westhampton Dentistry will be checking and taking calls routinely during the week as we shelter in place. Please be assured that we are here for you should you have any problems.

What is considered a dental emergency?

Dental emergencies, according to the American Dental Association, "are potentially life threatening and require immediate treatment to stop ongoing tissue bleeding [or to] alleviate severe pain or infection." What constitutes an emergency is actually pretty simple – it's about pain or trauma. Some common dental emergencies include:

- Severe dental pain (most people think of this as a "toothache")
- Pain from a wisdom tooth
- Post-operative pain from a dental surgery or procedure
- An abscess or localized pain and swelling
- A broken tooth resulting in pain or cutting your tongue or cheek
- A tooth being knocked out
- Dental treatment if a temporary crown or bridge is lost, broken, or causing gum irritation

Other emergency dental care includes extensive decay or defective fillings that cause pain, removal of stitches, denture adjustments for radiation/oncology patients, denture adjustments or repairs to address difficulty chewing, replacing a temporary filling on a tooth with a root canal if you are experiencing pain, and snipping or adjusting an orthodontic wire or appliance that is cutting your lips or cheeks.

What about my dental checkup that's scheduled?

Your oral health is important. But routine hygiene and cleaning appointments are considered non-emergent procedures. A more complete list of non-emergency dental procedures includes:

- Initial examinations (including x-rays)
- Periodic (three, four or six-month) checkups (also including x-rays)
- Routine dental cleanings and other preventive therapies
- Orthodontic procedures other than those to address a problem (e.g., pain, infection, trauma)
- Extraction of teeth that do not hurt (like having your wisdom teeth pulled)
- Fillings on cavities that aren't causing pain
- Aesthetic dental procedures (such as whitening)

Make no mistake — recare dental appointments are still very important. As soon as the crisis passes let's get that recare hygiene appointment rescheduled for you.

What happens when I get to the dental office with an emergency?

You will be greeted by a team member. We have taken precautionary measures to limit exposure by staggering appointments scheduled. We may request that you stay in the car and will text or call you when it is appropriate to enter the office. Your safety and reducing the possible spread of the virus between patients is of the utmost importance.

Dr. Way or a team member will ask you Covid-19 related health questions, take your temperature, and have you sign an emergency dental treatment consent form.

The Westhampton Dentistry team will also monitor the health of our team members in order to limit possible exposure to the virus. If Dr. Way is comfortable with the answers to the screening questions and your condition does need emergency attention, then he will render the appropriate treatment. Even if you have what might qualify as an emergency, Dr. Way will evaluate if a procedure can be delayed for 30 days. This judgment would be based on assuring that waiting won't cause you undue harm or pain.

What safety measures will the office take if I have to come in for an emergency treatment?

As health-care providers, Dr. Way and our team are trained on the CDC guidelines for infection control and using the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as mask and gloves. As always, we are going the extra mile to make sure the treatment areas and equipment are disinfected in between patients. Extra precautionary measures are taken from the entrance to the clinical rooms.

If I'm missing my checkup should I do anything differently?

Make sure you are brushing and flossing. It's never been more important to do the best job possible to maintain your oral health. Since many of us will have extra time on our hands, make sure you brush at least twice a day for two minutes and floss your teeth daily.

Stay home, stay safe, and know that we're here for you

Please feel free to give us a call at **(804)288-0948** or email us at drway@westhamptondentistry.com with any questions or concerns. During this time there will be a lot of things that may seem different in the dental office, but as soon as the virus is under control and it is safe to return for normal dental treatment, we'll be happy to welcome you back!

Visit us online at www.westhamptondentistry.com