Flu pandemic advice

The Department of Health has issued advice to dentists in the event of a flu pandemic. This includes contacting asymptomatic patients 24 hours before an appointment to ensure they are symptom-free and screening them when they arrive.

In the case of infected patients, treatment should be delayed until they are asymptomatic, if possible. PCTs will provide advice on additional precautions required for emergency care.

During a flu epidemic, dental practices should ensure excellent hygiene, with disposable tissues for staff to cover the face during and after sneezing, coughing and wiping or blowing the nose, or during and after contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects. Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water or alcohol rub for 30 seconds.

Coughing and sneezing patients in waiting areas should wear surgical masks. Non-essential items such as soft furnishings, as well as toys, books, newspapers and magazines) should be removed from reception and waiting areas.

Staff should not travel to and from work in uniforms, which should be transported in a tied plastic bag and washed separately. Dental healthcare workers who have recovered from the pandemic strain of influenza are unlikely to develop or transmit it, so should be prioritised for the care of patients with influenza.

Where patients with flu-like illness are seen at the same practice as non-influenza patients, it is important that the two groups are separated or seen at different times.

Wherever possible, different teams of staff should care for influenza and non-influenza patients, possibly by two practices working together. Recovered staff should work in the ‘infected’ surgery and wear sterilised surgical masks, gloves and aprons.

Treatment of infected patients should be limited to relief of pain and avoiding aerosol generating procedures. Where this is not possible, turning on high volume aspiration before the turbine will help to reduce aerosol.

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