

Expectations for clinical and ethical practice

Practice Standard #9

Applies to Dental Hygienists



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The British Columbia College of Oral Health Professionals (BCCOHP) was created on September 1, 2022 through the amalgamation of four health regulatory colleges: the College of Dental Hygienists of BC, the College of Dental Surgeons of BC, the College of Dental Technicians of BC, and the College of Denturists of BC. All current requirements for standards of clinical and ethical practice issued by the four colleges remain in place upon amalgamation. This document was created by the College of Dental Hygienists of BC and will be updated to reflect the amalgamation.

PRACTICE STANDARD POLICY #9

9.1 The Regulation sets out the performance and purpose of applying intra-oral radiographs (x-rays) and extra-oral radiographs. In accordance with the Regulation:

5 (2) A registrant in the course of practicing dental hygiene may, during assessment and for diagnostic or imaging purposes, apply ...

(a) intra-oral X-rays,

(b) extra-oral X-rays for the purpose of implementing an authorization, issued by a person who is authorized under the Act to apply extra-oral X-rays, to apply extra-oral X-rays to a named individual.

In the process of forming a dental hygiene diagnosis, a dental hygienist collects baseline assessment data as appropriate for the client and as indicated by clinical findings, which includes applying ionizing radiation and interpreting radiographs.

Client exposure to radiographs follows the principle of ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable). Attempts are made whenever possible to obtain recent radiographs from another oral health care provider to avoid unnecessary exposures. A dental hygienist ensures the quality of the radiographic exposure is adequate for diagnostic purposes.

A dental hygienist is responsible for documenting the number of radiographic exposures as well as the interpretation of the radiographic findings in the client's treatment record. Any findings on the radiograph that fall outside of the Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice are referred for consultation to the client's dentist and/or other appropriate health professional. This referral is documented in the client's treatment record.

A dental hygienist obtains informed consent from the client (or their representative) prior to exposing a radiograph. Authorization is also obtained from the client/representative and documented in the client treatment record prior to sharing any radiographs with another health professional. Security measures are taken when sharing radiographs electronically.

A dental hygienist informs clients of the rationale for taking radiographs and what the process entails. When a client (or their representative) refuses the radiographs that have been recommended, they will be informed of the risks associated with refusing radiographs. This information is then documented in the client's treatment record and initialed by the dental hygienist and the client (or their representative). Obtaining the client's signature confirms the inclusive nature of the discussion and the client's ownership of the decision.

When applying ionizing radiation, a dental hygienist protects the client's safety by draping the client with a lead apron and thyroid collar. A dental hygienist ensures that potentially hazardous radiography materials are used safely, and according to manufacturers' recommendations and government guidelines (refer to [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System](#) (WHMIS) guidelines and sections 8 and 9 of Health Canada's "[Safety Code 30](#)").

CDHBC Limits and Conditions

A dental hygienist assesses the need for radiographs and only exposes and interprets bitewing or periapical radiographs for the explicit purpose of forming a dental hygiene diagnosis, treatment planning, and evaluating client care. A dental hygienist may however expose intra-oral or extra-oral radiographs for other dental purposes upon the explicit authorization by a dentist or other qualified health professional.

Any conditions, abnormalities or pathologies identified radiographically that are beyond a dental hygienist's scope of practice to diagnose or treat (e.g. caries, endodontic abscess, etc.) will be referred to an appropriate health professional. A dental hygienist implements and documents a process for consultation and collaboration with other health professionals in order to ensure the provision of safe, ethical, client-centred care. A dental hygienist collaborates with other health professionals to reduce unnecessary radiographic exposure.

In addition, a dental hygienist who is responsible for radiographic equipment adheres to the parameters of [Safety Code 30](#) , the BC Centre for Disease

Control's [Dental X-Ray Facts](#), and the Government of Canada's [Radiation Emitting Devices Regulations](#)¹.

When directed by an authorized individual, a dental hygienist may apply intra-oral and extra-oral radiographs for the purposes indicated by the authorizing authority. For example, a panoramic radiograph or cone beam image may be taken by a dental hygienist under the authorization of another health professional and with the appropriate education. The final interpretation of these images will be completed by the authorizing individual.

¹ Radiation Protection in Dentistry – Recommended Safety Procedures for the Use of Dental X-ray Equipment, Health Canada, Radiation Emitting Devices Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. R-1)