

Dental Hygiene

Dental hygienists are licensed health care professionals who serve integral roles in the delivery of health care, including preventive dental services, nonsurgical periodontal therapy, patient/family/community education, nutritional counseling, and tobacco cessation referral. Hygienists examine patients' oral cavity – including the head, neck, lips, cheeks, tongue, teeth and gums – recording the presence of diseases or abnormalities. After assessing a client's conditions, they develop a dental hygiene diagnosis and dental hygiene process of care for the client using critical thinking and problem solving through evidence-based practice within accepted standards of care.

Hygienists may not diagnose oral diseases, but they remove plaque, calculus, and stains from teeth, perform root planning, expose and develop dental x-rays, and apply cavity-preventive agents, such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants. In some states, they also administer local anesthetics and nitrous oxide; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; and remove sutures. As licensed healthcare professionals, hygienists adhere to the Professional Code of Ethics and state and federal laws in the provision of dental hygiene care and other endeavors where applicable while performing self-assessment for life-long learning and professional growth.

Working Environment

Dental Hygienists are primarily employed in the private dental practice. Full-time, part-time, evening, and weekend schedules are widely available. Dentists frequently hire hygienists to work 2 or 3 days a week, so hygienists may hold jobs in more than one dental office. Dental Hygienists also are employed in other areas such as education, dental sales, public health, marketing, and research.

Professional Associations

American Dental Hygienists' Association- www.adha.org

Georgia Dental Hygienists' Association- www.gdha.org