

Dentists say it's safe to schedule appointments and procedures

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

As Caledon rolls into Phase 2 of Ontario's economic reopening, some members of the community have admitted to still feeling a little skeptical going back to some businesses, perhaps most notably being their dentist.

Dr. Robert Pacione, a dentist since 1993, is member of the Ontario Alliance of Dentists, and advocate for patient safety. He explains that patient safety is the number one priority for dentists, noting many measures have been put into place to ensure people can feel as comfortable as possible when making an appointment.

‘Since the COVID-10 pandemic broke out in Ontario, dentists have been challenged with ongoing changes to guidelines, clinic closures and significant costs to retrofit clinics. But Ontario dentists have also been dealing with COVID-19 confusion causing fear among Ontarians to go to their dentist,’ said Dr. Pacione. ‘Media reports referring to dental clinics as ‘ticking time bombs’ or reporting on a lack of PPE supplies has been misleading.’

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses were forced to close their doors and encouraged to work remotely if possible. Most, if not all, dentist clinics just had to wait patiently until conditions began to clear up and they were informed they could head back to work.

Dentists have been instructed to implement a series of safety measures to keep their patients safe which include, a pre-screening, physical distancing among staff and patients, ensuring each room is thoroughly cleaned between appointments, and making sure personal protective equipment is always used.

‘Dentists have implemented many changes to ensure the safety of patients as directed by the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. The RCDSO and the Minister have approved the reopening of dental clinics and most have reopened. Around 10 percent of offices have been opened throughout the pandemic and there has not been a single case of COVID-19 contracted through a dental clinic,’ said Dr Pacione.

Alongside several other businesses who are playing catch-up with their business from being temporarily closed, dentist offices have been doing all they can to continue providing dental care for their communities, alongside trying to keep up with the list of safety measures set in place, and steady flow of patients. But, now they’re ready for your return.

‘Dentists are communicating directly with patients to let them know they’re open again, whether through newsletters or phone calls,’ explained Dr. Pacione. ‘The most important message to my patients is ‘it is safe to come to your dentist and it is important to call me and consult on any pain or issues you may be experiencing’.’

Dentists offices were finally given the go-ahead to open their doors last month.

Ontario Dental Association President, Dr. Lesli Hapak stated in a news release, ‘dentists are happy to get back to providing care but it's not like flipping the switch. Dentists have a backlog of patients and have to treat those who need immediate care first ‘it's been 12 weeks since people have been able to see the dentist, and some are in greater need right now. We're asking for everyone's patience and understanding.’

Nermine Gadalla, a staff member at Bolton's Smiley Dental, explained how she and her team have enforced the safety measures they have been instructed to implement.

‘We’re doing a lot of measures for infection control now,’ she said. ‘We’re doing more disinfecting, wearing PPE, the N95 masks. After the patient leaves, the room is left for three hours, where we wipe everything down. Every surface.’

She added, "We're taking a lot of precautions, to avoid the spread."

Smiley Dental has only two rooms in their clinic, allowed traffic easy to maintain and areas to be disinfected. Most importantly, they are happy to be serving the community.

"It's just a great feeling," said Gadalla.