From German Dental Association – April 20, 2020

**The current situation depicts as follows**: Germany entered into a kind of "lock-down" (leaving home only for work, groceries shopping and some physical activity) on 22nd March and it will last at least until 3rd May 2020. The aim of the lockdown is to minimize contact between people and slow down the spread of Coronavirus. The dentists and their dental practices are considered being essential for a functioning public (health) system by law and therefore, the dental practices remained open.

On 13th March 2020, the federal government called on hospitals to postpone all elective treatments and surgeries in order to be prepared to care for potential COVID-19 patients in ICUs. On 20th March 2020, the German Dental Association, in close cooperation with other dental associations and the German ministry of health, advised dentists to postpone non-essential treatments and to limit activities to urgent and emergency treatments only. This includes also dental visits to nursing homes and care facilities. This advise still upholds until today. Therefore, it is difficult for the German Dental Association to speak of a "return to dental practice", since, on the one hand, we are still in a kind of lockdown and on the other hand, the dental practices never stopped operating (fully). However, the German Dental Association made available a great number of information how to adapt to the new situation (all information available here<<https://www.bzaek.de/berufsausuebung/sars-cov-2covid-19.html>>, unfortunately in German only).

**\*Framework for "Returning to Practice"**: The German Dental Association advises to contact the patients via phone first. Questions to be asked: Do you have any symptom of a respiratory disease? Do you belong to a risk group, especially vulnerable to COVID-19? What are the reasons for having a dental appointment (could the treatment be postponed?)? Upon arriving, it is recommended to separate patients (bringing them directly to the respective treatment room), ask them to disinfect their hands and wearing a face mask. Moreover, it is recommended to generally limit the number of patients in practices by more general means: using teledentistry/consultation, issuing sick leave by phone consultation (exception, generally not allowed in Germany), sending prescriptions and referrals by post mail.

**\*Checklists/guidance documents:** There is not "one document", but a number of documents on how to best operate a dental practice during the Coronavirus crisis. For example, the hygiene plan for dental practices was modified accordingly. Moreover, some advise was published on how to limit patient numbers in practices, how to organize best a practice during these challenging times and how to best inform patients to ensure their and the dental personnel' safety. Guidelines were issued on how to treat (Suspected) COVID-19 patients.

**\*The procurement and distribution of PPEs remain difficult.** For treating COVID-19 patients, dentists and chairside assistants have to be equipped with protective visor, FFP2 mask, gloves, gowns and overshoes. The federal government aims at central procurement of PPEs, but despite all efforts the situation remains difficult and many dentists seem not to be fully equipped to treat even a suspected COVID-19 patient. Therefore, some regional dental organizations decided to choose only certain dental practices to treat infected patients, in order to have enough protective equipment available and facilitate distribution. Moreover, certain regulations were weakened, for example it is now allowed to reuse certain masks after disinfection or washable gowns are allowed.

General information about the development of the Coronavirus infection in Germany is provided by the Robert-Koch-Institute, available here<<https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html>> in English.