



## CNA HealthPro

### A Safety Checklist for Your Office

As a dentist, your responsibility for patient safety extends beyond the provision of care. You also have an ethical and legal duty to make your premises as safe as possible for all visitors.

To protect your patients and yourself, it is necessary to establish an effective accident prevention and emergency preparedness program. Such a program involves identifying risks, preparing for possible emergencies and implementing appropriate practice policies. And, as even the best precautions cannot always prevent adverse events, it is also necessary to maintain adequate general liability insurance coverage.

The time spent detecting and remedying potential hazards is an investment in peace of mind. The following checklist highlights some of the more common areas of liability exposure:

#### Identifying Risks

- **Tour your premises on a regular basis.** Follow the path of patients and visitors from the parking lot to the operatory. If possible, conduct safety tours with an outsider who can observe your premises objectively.
- **Look carefully for potential dangers** such as parking lot potholes, cracked paving, uneven steps, slippery or unswept floors, burned-out bulbs, sharp edges, loose carpeting, flimsy or broken furniture, unstable coat racks or cabinets, heavy objects on high shelves, open file or desk drawers, and electric cords strung across walkways.
- **In winter, assign a staff member to check every day for icy patches,** snow-blocked paths and wet floor areas. This is particularly important for practices with older or disabled patients.
- **Document your inspections,** problems noted and repairs made. A simple checklist with room for notes will suffice.

#### Preparing for Emergencies

##### Medical Safety

- **Be aware of what your state's dental practice act regulations require** in terms of emergency training and equipment.
- **Establish a schedule for checking and updating your medical emergency kit** and any life-support equipment you may have.
- **Maintain CPR certification** for yourself and all staff members. Document completion of training.
- **Train dental staff members to call for medical assistance immediately** in emergency situations. Emergency numbers should be prominently posted near the telephone. Hold regular medical emergency drills.

## Fire Safety

- **Develop and post an evacuation plan.** Hold regular drills.
- **Make sure that fire exits are unobstructed,** easily opened, well marked and lighted.
- **Install smoke detectors** and assign a staff member to test detectors and fire alarms regularly.
- **Test and recharge fire extinguishers** according to manufacturer recommendations.
- **Avoid overloading electrical circuits.** Frequent outages are a danger sign. Wiring should be inspected periodically, especially in older buildings.
- **Train employees in proper handling of tanks of compressed gas.** Make this training part of the orientation process.

## Legal and Practice Policy Issues

- **Read your lease carefully.** Check how “premises” is defined and which party – landlord or tenant – is responsible for public areas.
- **Keep up to date on state laws and federal regulations.** Professional publications are a good source of information, as are OSHA seminars and related events.
- **Establish an emergency plan and accident reporting policy** within your practice. Include these policies in the office policy manual, and have all newly hired staff members read and sign them.
- **Make sure your staff is aware of safety issues.** Discuss your accident prevention programs at staff meetings and encourage staff to ask questions and report any unusual events.

## Insurance issues

- **Read your policy carefully.** Check that the correct name of the business entity you wish to insure appears on the declaration page of the policy.
- **Know what types of damages are covered and excluded** by your general liability policy, as well as the policy limits. If you have any questions, contact your state administrator agent to discuss adding optional coverages or higher limits.
- **Notify your insurer immediately** in the event of an accident.
- **Discuss safety and risk management questions with your insurance representative.**

The most important element in any accident prevention program is the commitment and leadership of the dentist. Your own attitudes and actions will set the tone for your staff.

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