



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

PO Box 47890 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7890

Tel: (360) 236-4501 • FAX: (360) 586-7424 • TDD Relay Service: 1-800-833-6388

**NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF AN INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT
OR POLICY STATEMENT**

Title of Interpretive or Policy Statement: Dentist Standard of Care- Radiographs

Issuing Entity: Dental Quality Assurance Commission

Subject Matter: Appropriate standard of care for dentists related to taking of radiographs.

Effective Date: July 21, 2017

Contact Person: Jennifer Santiago, Program Manager
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Department of Health
PO Box 47852
Olympia, WA 98504-7852
360.236.4893

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Interpretive Statement

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<i>Title:</i>	Dentist Standard of Care - Radiographs	<i>Number:</i> IS-2
<i>References:</i>	RCW 18.32.020 and WAC 246-817-305	
<i>Contact:</i>	Jennifer Santiago, Program Manager	
<i>Phone:</i>	360-236-4893	
<i>Email:</i>	Jennifer.santiago@doh.wa.gov	
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The Dental Quality Assurance Commission is frequently asked by patients and dentists whether radiographs are required to be taken as part of a dental examination. The Commission issues this interpretive statement to give guidance to dentists regarding the use of radiographs as part of a dental examination.

The Commission finds that the dental standard of care includes a report on the patient's subjective complaints, objective findings, an assessment or diagnosis of the patient's condition and treatment plan. A dentist must use their clinical and professional judgment in determining when dental radiographs are required to make an accurate diagnosis or provide treatment to a patient.

Background and Analysis

Radiograph or x-ray: A beam of ionizing radiation produced by a machine for making radiographs or similar records of dental or oral tissues.

[RCW 18.32.020](#) defines dentistry as:

A person practices dentistry, within the meaning of this chapter, who (1) represents himself or herself as being able to diagnose, treat, remove stains and concretions from teeth, operate or prescribe for any disease, pain, injury, deficiency, deformity, or physical condition of the human teeth, alveolar process, gums, or jaw, or (2) offers or undertakes by any means or methods to diagnose, treat, remove stains or concretions from teeth, operate or prescribe for any disease, pain, injury, deficiency, deformity, or physical condition of the same, or take impressions of the teeth or jaw, or (3) owns, maintains, or operates an office for the practice of dentistry, or (4)

engages in any of the practices included in the curricula of recognized and approved dental schools or colleges, or (5) professes to the public by any method to furnish, supply, construct, reproduce, or repair any prosthetic denture, bridge, appliance, or other structure to be worn in the human mouth.

...

X-ray diagnosis as to the method of dental practice in which the diagnosis and examination is made of the normal and abnormal structures, parts, or functions of the human teeth, the alveolar process, maxilla, mandible or soft tissues adjacent thereto, is hereby declared to be the practice of dentistry.

...

[WAC 246-817-305](#) (3) states in relevant part:

(3) The clinical record must include at least the following information:

...

(d) The physical examination findings documented by subjective complaints, objective findings, an assessment or diagnosis of the patient's condition, and plan;

(e) A treatment plan based on the assessment or diagnosis of the patient's condition;

(f) Up-to-date dental and medical history that may affect dental treatment;...

(k) Notation of communication to or from the patient or patient's parent or guardian, including:

(i) Notation of the informed consent discussion. This is a discussion of potential risk(s) and benefit(s) of proposed treatment, recommended tests, and alternatives to treatment, including no treatment or tests;

...

The standard of care requires an appropriate examination and diagnosis prior to dental treatment. Chapters 18.32 RCW and 246-817 WAC do not explicitly require radiographs as part of a dental examination nor must radiographs always be taken prior to dental treatment. Radiographs assist a dentist in diagnosing many oral diseases and conditions. The standard of care and clinical decision on when radiographs are necessary or appropriate are based on many factors including, but not limited to, whether the patient is new or established, the age of the patient, and what type of dental treatment is being recommended/undertaken. A dentist must also consider the benefits of taking a radiograph versus the risk of exposing a patient to ionizing radiation.

The American Dental Association has provided guidance on the use of radiographs. It states, “[t]he dentist is advised to conduct a clinical examination, consider the patient’s signs, symptoms and oral and medical histories, as well as consider the patient’s vulnerability to environmental factors that may affect oral health. This diagnostic and evaluative information may determine the type of imaging to be used or the frequency of its use. Dentists should only order radiographs when they expect that the additional diagnostic information will affect patient care.”¹

Conclusion

The Commission finds that the dental standard of care includes a report on the patient’s subjective complaints, objective findings, an assessment or diagnosis of the patient's condition and treatment

¹ Dental Radiographic Examinations: Recommendations for Patient Selection and Limiting Radiation Exposure by the American Dental Association and U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Revised 2012.

http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Member%20Center/Files/Dental_Radiographic_Examinations_2012.ashx

plan. A dentist must use their clinical and professional judgment in determining when dental radiographs are required to make an accurate diagnosis or provide treatment to a patient. A patient has the right to refuse any treatment, including x-rays. A dentist should inform the patient of the benefits and risks associated with refusing treatment and potential risks of x-rays. A dentist is not obligated to treat a patient who does not agree with a treatment plan, including x-rays. If the patient refuses treatment, the dentist should make a notation regarding the discussion and refusal in the patient record.