

Healthcare Practitioners and Technicians

Dental Hygienists

Dental Hygienists typically clean and polish teeth, remove tartar, stains, plaque, and soft and hard deposits. They examine teeth and gums in order to report the presence of any disease or abnormalities, take pictures of teeth using x-ray machines and develop the film. They may use models of teeth to explain oral hygiene, perform root planning as a periodontal therapy, or apply cavity-preventative agents such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants. Dental hygienists educate patients on how to practice good oral hygiene which includes explaining how oral health and diet are related, and how to select a toothbrush and properly brush and floss teeth.

Depending on the state that a hygienist practices in they may be allowed to administer anesthetics, local anesthetics using syringes, place and carve fillings and periodontal dressings, remove sutures, and smooth and polish metal restorations. Some states allow hygienists to place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; and smooth and polish metal restorations. Dental hygienists use an assortment of tools to complete their tasks. Hand and rotary instruments and ultrasonic devices are used to clean and polish teeth. Dental hygienists sometimes make a diagnosis and other times prepare clinical and laboratory diagnostic tests for the dentist to interpret. They sometimes work chair-side with the dentist during treatment.

Dental hygienists work in clean, well-lighted offices for a standard 40 hour week although many jobs are part time. Important health safeguards include strict adherence to proper radiological procedures and the use of appropriate protective devices when administering anesthetic gas. Dental hygienists must wear safety glasses, surgical masks, and gloves to protect themselves and patients from infectious diseases.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

To become a dental hygienist one must obtain a degree from a dental hygienist school accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation. Most dental hygiene programs are associate degree programs. There are some programs, however, that offer certificates, bachelor's, or master's degrees. Those who wish to be dental hygienists in private dental offices require an associate's degree or a certificate in dental hygiene.

For jobs involving research, teaching, or practicing dental hygiene in public or school health programs having a bachelor's or master's degree in dental hygiene is required. Entrance into a dental hygiene program typically requires a high school diploma and college entrance test scores. Some schools require the completion of 1 year of college. An associate's degree or certificate in dental hygiene is obtained in 2 years, a

bachelor's degree in 4 years, and a master's degree in 2 years (after 4 years of a bachelor's degree).

Dental hygienists must be licensed in the state that they wish to practice in. Typical requirements for state licensure, including the state of New York are:

- Graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program
- Passing both a written and clinical exam
- Passing an additional examination based on the legal aspects of practicing dental hygiene in the particular state the applicant is seeking licensure

The written exam is administered by the American Dental Association's (ADA) Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations and is accepted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The clinical exam and the legal exam are both administered by the state the applicant is seeking licensure in.

More Information on Licensing:

- American Dental Hygienists Association (ADHA) Requirements:
<http://www.adha.org/careerinfo/index.html>
- New York State Dentistry License:
<http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/dent/dentlimlic.htm>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree earned at an accredited public university in a dental hygiene program costs an average of \$11,500* per year. Completion time is generally two years. Tuition and fees for a PhD in dental hygiene or a related area costs an average of \$14,900* per year. Completion time is generally three to four years.

Licensure Fees and license renewal fees vary by state. New York State Licensure Fee: \$128, plus the cost of any exam study aids

Costs of continuing education vary.

*Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.