



# Pima County Health Department

*A healthy Pima County: Everyone. Everywhere. Everyday.*

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## **Health Department Contacting Patients Regarding Potential Exposure to Blood Borne Pathogens**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL April 17, 2013**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

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**1. How could an exposure to Hepatitis B (HBV), Hepatitis C (HCV), or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) have occurred in a dentist's office?**

When healthcare workers are not careful about preventing the spread of diseases from patient to patient, exposures to diseases like Hepatitis or HIV can occur. Appropriate infection control includes disinfecting and sterilizing instruments, proper disposal of sharp objects, not using faulty or broken equipment, and not reusing items like needles and syringes between patients.

**2. What caused the possible exposures that Pima County Health Department is contacting these patients about?**

In this particular case, a piece of equipment that was not installed or connected correctly may have been used during patient procedures. This could have caused patients to come in contact with any contaminants left in or on the device from other patients. The device in question was installed in January 2010 and was discontinued in July of 2010.

**3. When was this problem identified?**

At the end of March 2013, The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) asked the Pima County Health Department to help notify patients who may have been exposed in this situation. Since then, it took a great deal of work for ADHS to identify the people who needed to be contacted and for PCHD to start notifying these patients. Patients began receiving notice Tuesday April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

**4. Who are the people being contacted? Could I or my child have been exposed and not contacted?**

Any patients who received dental care at the T Dental Clinic located at 3662 W. Ina Road from January 2010 to July 2010 are being contacted. If you or a family member had a dental procedure done at T Dental Clinic before January 2010, there is no reason to believe there are any exposure risks.

**5. Does this happen often in dental offices?**

There have been very few instances nationwide and none in Pima County according to records. In very rare instances HIV and Hepatitis B have been known to be transmitted in the dental setting if proper infection control practices are not followed. Hepatitis C transmission has not been documented in the dental setting.

**6. What is being done to address this possible exposure problem?**

The County Health Department is diligently trying to notify patients that were seen at the dental office during the January 2010 to July 2010 time. ADHS developed a patient list (about 170 individuals) from dental records and PCHD is using that to notify exposed individuals.

**7. What happens if someone tests positive for one of these viruses?**

In the event that positive tests arise, that patient's primary care provider will provide them with guidance and further diagnostic and treatment options.

**8. What if one of these patients tests positive but does not have insurance or a primary care provider?**

PCHD is asking that if a patient is:

- (a) contacted
- (b) does not have insurance and/or a primary care provider
- (c) needs testing

Contact PCHD by calling (520) 243-7808 or toll free at 1-866-939-7462, Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to set up testing at a PCHD clinic free of charge.

**9. What is the test for HIV and Hepatitis B and C?**

HBV, HCV, and HIV are tested for using patient blood samples.

**10. Do I need to be tested if I was a patient of T Dental before January 2010 or after July 2010?**

No. There is no evidence that the improperly installed equipment was used outside of the period we are concerned with, January 2010 to July 2010.

**11. I don't remember who my dentist was between January 2010 and July 2010. Should I get tested?**

Only patients who had dental care at T Dental Office, 3662 W. Ina Road (next to Sleep America) between January 2010 and July 2010 need to be tested.

**12. Who can I talk to about dental licensing, inspections, and safety practices?**

The [Arizona State Board of Dental Examiners](#) oversees the licensing of individuals who provide dental services in Arizona and serves all citizens who receive dental services. For more information they may be contacted at: (602) 242-1492.

**13. Does Pima County oversee or inspect dental offices?**

The Pima County Health Department does not do inspections, regulate, or license dental practices in any way. We are only being asked in partnership with the Arizona Department of Health Services to assist in contacting patients who may have been exposed during the January 2010 to July 2010 period.

**14. What do dentists do to protect their patients from blood borne viruses?**

Dentists should follow established guidelines to prevent exposure of staff and patients to any blood or body fluids. Please go to [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org) to learn more about infection control practices in dental offices.

Your dentist cares about your safety and works hard to prevent the spread of infection. Dentists, like other healthcare professionals, are trained to use precautions to protect themselves and their patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed special recommendations for use in dental offices. The CDC Guidelines are a comprehensive set of recommendations for infection control practices relevant to the dental office and may be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The American Dental Association has long advocated the use of infection control procedures in dental offices and provides dentists with resources to help them understand and implement them. Please go to <http://www.ada.org> to learn more about infection control practices in dental offices.

### **15. What should I do to protect myself and my family from illnesses in dental care settings?**

A great article can be found on the CNN Health website: “5 things to do at the dentist’s office”  
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/29/health/dentist-5-things>

Dentists, like other healthcare professionals are concerned about your safety in the dental setting. You can visit the American Dental Associations’ website at [www.mouthhealthy.org](http://www.mouthhealthy.org) to see a video that has information to help you take an active part in your oral healthcare.

### **16. Where can I get more information about what PCHD is doing to help in this effort?**

For more information about this notification process please call us at (520) 243-7808 or toll free at 1-866-939-7462 Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

### **17. What is Hepatitis B (HBV)?**

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver. Most adults who get HBV have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute HBV. Sometimes the virus causes a long-term infection, called chronic HBV. Over time, it can damage your liver. Babies and young children infected with the virus are more likely to get chronic HBV. For more information or details about HBV, go to [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/b](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/b).

### **18. What is Hepatitis C (HCV)?**

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. In time, it can lead to permanent liver damage as well as cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver failure. Many people don't know that they have HCV until they already have some liver damage. This can take many years. Some people who get HCV have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute HCV. But most people who are infected with the virus go on to develop long-term, or chronic, HCV. For more information or details about HCV, go to [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/).

### **19. What is Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)?**

Human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, is the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). The virus weakens a person's ability to fight infections and cancer. Having HIV does not always mean that you have AIDS. It can take many years for people with the virus to develop AIDS. HIV and AIDS cannot be cured. However, with the medications available today, it is possible to have a normal lifespan with little or minimal interruption in quality of life. There are ways to help people stay healthy and live longer. For more information or details about HIV, go to [www.cdc.gov/hiv/](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/).