



Dentists can no longer treat patients for issues such as chipped teeth, bleeding or sore gums.  
Image by Mick Tsikas/AAP PHOTOS

HEALTH

## Dental industry hit hard by coronavirus

By Carly Waters

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Australian dentists are concerned some of their businesses could be wiped out as the coronavirus forces price increases and creates confusion around essential dental work.

The Australian Dental Association was placed under level three restrictions by the government on Friday, meaning dentists can no longer treat patients for issues such as chipped teeth, bleeding or sore gums, dentures, crown and bridge issues or jaw problems.

It also rules out a routine scale and clean.

Melbourne dental surgeon Dr Yvonne King said fear, skyrocketing costs, expensive technology and the closure of dental wholesale suppliers caused by the coronavirus emergency were factors that will put the industry under stress.

"We used to be able to get masks for 9 cents, but they've now gone up to a dollar. It is a huge increase," Dr King told AAP.

The fear driven by coronavirus means some dental surgeries have closed, but Dr King said it was important to stay open for the sake of patients and surgery staff.

“A lot of people are not comfortable working with the risks we are exposed to, but I think it is important to stay open and look after people ... we are all in this together.”

Dr King said another factor hurting the industry was many people remain unclear what dental work can still go ahead.

“There is confusion now about what is essential dental work and what’s not. Management of acute dental pain, trauma, treatment already started is allowed under these restrictions,” she said.

The problems associated with neglected dental work are not limited to issues of the mouth and could be quite serious, Dr King said.

“You can contract septicaemia, gingivitis, lose teeth, even jaw bone by putting off dental work. Your teeth need to last longer than the coronavirus and your tooth health is often related to other medical complications.”

With many people no longer able to visit their dentist, Dr King said maintaining regular brushing and flossing is crucial.

“Don’t give up on your mouth, that’s important,” she said.

Practices such as Dr King’s have implemented stringent measures to allow for social distancing and are conducting some consultations via phone and Skype.

The decision to treat a patient amid the coronavirus pandemic is ultimately up to each individual dentist, according to the ADA.

“The decision of whether to treat a patient at risk of COVID-19 should be made by the dental practitioner after taking into consideration the safety of the dental team and other patients,” the ADA said on its website.

