

Considerations for Practicing Dental Hygiene in a Van or Other Vehicle

Providing dental hygiene services in a van or other vehicle presents unique challenges for occupational health and safety that dental hygienists must address. Dental hygiene practice owners and operators are responsible for:

- Applying an evidence-informed approach to setting up their practices and integrating evidence and best practices when developing organizational policies. ([Evidence-Informed Practice](#) Standard of Practice);
- Complying with relevant laws and regulations in Alberta ([Professional Accountability](#) Standard of Practice); and
- Protecting their patients, themselves, and others from illness and injury by ensuring a safe practice environment and complying with applicable provincial occupational health and safety legislation ([Safety and Risk Management](#) Standard of Practice).

Alberta's OHS legislation requires employers to conduct hazard assessments and to eliminate identified hazards. If the hazards cannot be eliminated, the employer must introduce controls to protect against the hazards. This document focuses on how Alberta's [Occupational Health and Safety](#) (OHS) Legislation impacts a dental hygienist practicing in a van/vehicle setting. Dental hygiene practice owners and operators must be familiar with OHS legislation and fulfill their responsibilities as employers and workers related to hazard assessment and control in their dental hygiene practice.

The College has identified some of the unique risks associated with practicing dental hygiene in a van or vehicle setting in a list below. This list of risks and example controls is not exhaustive. Consider your own practice setting and conduct a hazard assessment of your work site. The risks and controls that you identify may vary from the ones listed in this document.

Before addressing the risks below, read [Hazard Assessment and Control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers](#) to understand the categories of health and safety hazards and the process for conducting a hazard assessment.

List of Risks and Example Controls

	Risk	Example control(s) to eliminate or mitigate risk
1	<p><i>Biological hazard (body fluids)</i></p> <p>Risk- Cross contamination from surfaces that cannot be adequately cleaned and disinfected (e.g., porous materials)</p>	<p>All surfaces are smooth, intact, easily cleanable, compatible with cleaning and disinfecting products, non-porous, and waterproof. This includes the inside of cabinetry and fabrics.</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, Alberta Health Reusable & Single-use Medical Device Standards</p>
2	<p><i>Biological hazard (body fluids)</i></p> <p>Risk- Cross contamination between clinical and non-clinical spaces (e.g., driver's area in a vehicle)</p>	<p>Eliminate or use adequate controls to prevent contamination from splash, spray, splatter, and aerosols associated with clinical procedures (e.g., physical partition, policy on PPE use)</p> <p>Resource: ACDH IPC Guidelines</p>
3	<p><i>Biological (body fluids)</i></p> <p>Risk- Cross contamination of clean/sterile supplies due to improper storage</p>	<p>Ensure adequate and secure storage for clinical supplies, PPE, emergency supplies, First Aid Kit, oxygen tank (including masks and bag valve masks), computer, printer, sterile supplies, a bin for contaminated dental devices, etc...</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, Alberta Health Reusable & Single-use Medical Device Standards, CSA Z314</p>
	<p><i>Physical hazards (falling objects)</i></p> <p>Risk- Physical injury or cross contamination of supplies from driving with loose equipment</p>	
4	<p><i>Physical hazard (falls)</i></p> <p>Risk- Falls, injury when entering/exiting vehicle</p>	<p>Install appropriate aids (e.g., handles, rails)</p> <p>Resource: CSA Z8000</p>

<p>5</p>	<p><i>Biological hazard (body fluids)</i></p> <p>Risk- Cross contamination from visibly soiled hands</p>	<p>Designated hand hygiene sink is easily accessible for use when required.</p> <p>Hand hygiene sink is equipped with hot and cold water, liquid soap, single-use disposable towels, and waste receptacle.</p> <p>Entire water supply is immediately available when needed for handwashing (drawn from a single source without needing to switch tanks).</p> <p>Adequate steps are taken to ensure water supply and wastewater lines do not freeze up during cold weather.</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, CSA Z8000, AHS mobile food vending units, AHS hand hygiene sink requirements.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p><i>Biological hazard (bacteria)</i></p> <p>Risk – Biological contamination of freshwater supply used for sink</p> <p>Risk – Infection or contamination caused by water supply or sink</p>	<p>Hand hygiene sink is connected to a central, secure plumbing system in the van to avoid spillage, splashing or leakage.</p> <p>Water is obtained from a potable water source and bacteriological water samples from sink are tested regularly to ensure water quality is safe.</p> <p>Holding tanks and waterlines are maintained according to the manufacturer and best available evidence.</p> <p>Sink is of adequate size and is compliant with relevant municipal and health requirements.</p> <p>Sink design prevents splashing onto other surfaces during use.</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, CSA Z8000, AHS mobile food vending units, AHS hand hygiene sink requirements.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p><i>Biological hazard (wastewater)</i></p> <p>Risk- Infection or contamination from spillage of wastewater from sink</p>	<p>Systems and procedures are in place to prevent over-filling of wastewater (e.g., wastewater tank is at least 10% larger than total water supply volume).</p> <p>Wastewater tanks are securely fixed and plumbed into the water system.</p> <p>Tank can be easily drained into sanitary sewer.</p>

		Resource: AHS mobile food vending units
8	<p><i>Chemical hazard (toxic substance)</i></p> <p>Risk – poisoning risk from ingestion of antifreeze in water supply or risk of skin irritation from exposure to antifreeze</p>	<p>Ensure food grade anti-freeze is used and manufacturer's instructions are followed for flushing of sink water lines.</p> <p>Resource: AHS mobile food vending units</p>
9	<p><i>Biological hazard (body fluids, viruses, allergens, vapours) and chemical hazard (fumes)</i></p> <p>Risk - Vapours and gasses generated by, or emitted from, cleaning products, laser use, aerosol-generating procedures, disinfecting agents, gas generators, vehicle exhaust, etc</p>	<p>Ventilation systems are in place to efficiently remove airborne hazards and have been evaluated by the appropriate professional.</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, CSA Z8000, CSA Z317.2</p>
10	<p><i>Physical hazard (working with equipment)</i></p> <p>Risk – Unsafe operation of equipment if manufacturer's installation and operation requirements are not met</p>	<p>Ensure that there is a sufficient supply of power to operate all equipment safely and according to the manufacturer's instructions.</p> <p>Temperature and humidity are maintained to ensure alignment with equipment and device manufacturers instructions.</p> <p>Resources: OHS Code Part 3, Safety and Risk Management Standard of Practice</p>
11	<p><i>Biological hazard (body fluids)</i></p> <p>Risk – Contamination from exposure to suction waste</p>	<p>Suction waste canisters are emptied into an appropriate sanitary sewer system* or are solidified and disposed of as solid waste.</p> <p>*This can be done in a toilet or janitorial sink that is located off-site from the van. If disposing in the van, the toilet or sink must be plumbed to the sewage system (black water holding tank). The black water must be disposed of into an approved sanitary sewer (contact local municipality to identify drop off locations).</p> <p>Resources: ACDH IPC Guidelines, AHS Community Based Services Waste Disposal (Page 8).</p>

To eliminate or control the hazards in your van/vehicle, research and implement best practices and evidence-based policies for safety, risk management, and infection control from reliable sources.

Resources to consider for OHS include:

- Alberta OHS [Act, regulation and code](#)
 - The OHS Act has obligations for both employers and workers to ensure and protect the health and safety of workers and other persons at or in the vicinity of the work site. (Sections 3(1)(a)(iii) and 5(1)(a))
 - Part 3 of the OHS Code includes a requirement to follow equipment specifications from the manufacturer or professional engineer.
- Alberta [OHS resource portal](#) including but not limited to:
 - [Occupational Health and Safety Starter Kit](#)
 - [Legal terms 101: “reasonably practicable”](#)
 - [Hazard assessment and control – eLearning](#)
- [CSA Group](#) standards for health care facilities and medical device reprocessing (e.g., [Z314](#), [Z8000](#), [Z317.1](#)). These can be purchased or viewed with public library access or a [CSA Communities](#) Account.
- Alberta [Safety codes](#) and municipal requirements
- Alberta Health Services has developed organization-specific resources that may be helpful when building policies and procedures for your own business.
 - Recommendations [for hand hygiene sink requirements](#).
 - Community based services [resource manual](#) and [waste disposal](#) guides.
 - Expectations for plumbing and hand hygiene sinks installed in [mobile food vending units](#) (page 5).
 - Disinfecting and flushing [RV water tanks](#) and systems.