Help Control the Spread of Infection with the Right Face Mask

Amid the media blizzard and widespread fears surrounding the coronavirus, infection control is at the top of many people’s minds right now. While the coronavirus remains a much smaller threat than the flu – which has caused 14,000 deaths in the U.S. this season, compared to the coronavirus’s 2,000 deaths worldwide – it has nonetheless caused a renewed focus on infection transmission and protecting one’s health.

These issues are all the more important for those in the dental and medical profession, who come in close contact with patients’ mouths nearly every day. The mouth is a hotbed for bacteria and one of the major culprits for spreading illness. However, the threat of catching something from a patient can be seriously mitigated, by using a proper face mask.

Choosing the right face mask may feel like a tough decision with all the options available today. In general, dentists in all specialties, assistants, and hygienists should look for a mask that covers the nose, mouth, and chin while offering comfort and breathability. Beyond that, the choice becomes more technical, so we’ve compiled some guidelines that will help you make the right decision.

The Different Levels of Face Masks

ASTM International, a worldwide standards organization that develops voluntary technical standards for a range of products, has designated several different levels of face masks based on the environment and conditions to which they’re best suited. These voluntary standards were created to protect the health and safety of dental professionals and their patients.
ASTM’s face mask levels consist of the following:

- **Level I Face Masks (≥95% BFE & PFE):** Ideal for procedures where no amounts of fluid, spray, and/or aerosols are produced (meets EN14683 Rating – Type II Standard).
- **Level II Face Masks:** Ideal for procedures where moderate to light amounts of fluid, spray, and/or aerosols are produced (meets EN14683 Rating – Type IIR Standard).
- **Level III Face Masks (≥98% BFE & PFE):** Ideal for procedures where heavy to moderate amounts of fluid, spray, and/or aerosols are produced (meets EN14683 Rating – Type IIR Standard). Examples for Level 3 in dentistry would include all of the following: when using a handpiece, prophy jet, angle air polisher, and during any restorative, cleaning, and surgical procedures.

So, the next time you’re choosing a face mask at your dental practice, consider the amount of fluid, spray, and/or aerosols you expect to encounter during a given procedure.

**Face Masks for Dental Professionals**

Depending on how much protection you need, you may opt for a Level I or Level III face mask, both of which are offered by Richmond Dental & Medical and made in the USA. We recommend Level I face masks for exams, X-rays, and impressions. If you or your patient is feeling under the weather, we recommend opting for our Level III Path-O-Guard™ which offers additional protection against standard strains of the flu or the norovirus.

It’s always important to invest in high-quality materials for your dental practice, but even more so when they can help prevent the spread of illness and infection among your patients and employees. These are important risks to consider in any office setting, and especially dental and medical offices where there is greater potential for mouth contact. Keep your workers and patients safe this flu season by practicing good hand-washing, taking care of your body, and using the right
face mask.

Don’t forget to change your face masks frequently, after every patient. In many normal circumstances, professionals choose to wear masks for up to an hour of clinical use. However, if your mask is exposed to heavy spatter conditions and becomes wet, it may cease to offer adequate filtration after 20 minutes.

There have been many innovations in face mask technology through the years, and one with the right combination of protection and comfort is waiting for you.

Which Face Mask Makes the Most Sense for Dental Professionals?

Choosing the right face mask boils down to determining how much protection you want. At Richmond Dental we offer Level I and Level III face masks. Our Level I face mask can be used with each patient. However, should you or a patient feel under the weather, our Level III Path-O-Guard™ can offer additional protection against standard flu types or the dreaded norovirus. While we believe in high-quality dental products no matter the application, it’s even more important when one can have such a significant impact on your health, as well as your staff’s.