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Oral Health Workforce

Careers in Dentistry

General Dentist

A general dentist (DDS or DMD) is the primary oral health care provider. The general dentist diagnoses, treats, and manages the overall oral health of their patients. Treatment may include fluoride treatments, dental sealant placement, fillings, crowns, bridges, gum care, root canals, tooth removals, fabricating of removable appliances (dentures and partials), placing and restoring implanted teeth, cancer screenings/examinations, biopsy of hard and soft tissues, diagnosing and treatment of sleep apnea, care for temporomandibular joint (TMJ) dysfunction, influenza vaccinations, oral disease prevention, and nutritional counseling. Dentists will also screen for high blood pressure, diabetes/prediabetes, and other chronic illness. Training to be a general dentist includes a college bachelor's degree and graduation from an accredited dental school. There are three dental schools in Illinois. Learn more about a career in dentistry [here](#).

Job Outlook

Overall employment of dentists is projected to grow 3% from 2019 to 2029, about as fast as the average for all occupations. The demand for dental services is expected to increase as the population ages and as research continues to link oral health to overall health.

Pay

The median annual wage for dentists was \$159,200 in May 2019.

Specialized Dentistry A general dentist who has undergone additional training to specialize in an area of treatment.

- **Endodontist** Treats injuries to the dental pulp or nerve of the tooth; performs root canals and other types of surgical root procedures. Endodontists also are concerned with the overall health of the [dental pulp](#) and the tissues that surround the tooth.
- **Oral Surgeon** Performs surgical procedures relating to the mouth and jaw. An oral surgeon will extract teeth, place implants, and may remove tumors, perform biopsies, and readjust the jaw relating to fractures or bite differences.
- **Oral and Maxillofacial Radiologist** This is the newest specialty and was adopted in 2003. Oral and maxillofacial radiologists deal with taking and diagnosing radiographs. They are experts in viewing radiographs and interpreting them. They are trained to find the slightest discrepancies from normal and diagnose abnormalities in the facial structures.
- **Oral and Maxillofacial Pathologist** Oral and maxillofacial pathologists deal with all types of disease and growths found in and around the oral cavity. If your dentist suspects you have a disease, he or she might send your radiographs and a biopsy (a sample of the suspected tissue) to an oral pathologist. The oral pathologist will conduct tests, including microscopic analysis of tissue samples, to arrive at a diagnosis.

- **Pedodontist** A pediatric dentist is one who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of oral diseases in children. Treatments may include fillings, simple tooth removal of primary or permanent teeth, dental cleaning, and crafting appliances that hold space for permanent teeth. Some treatment is done in a hospital setting under anesthesia.
- **Periodontist** Concentrates on diagnosing, treating, and preventing diseases of the soft tissues of the mouth, including gum infection; periodontal disease; and may also place implants, perform crown lengthening, bone grafting, and tissue grafts.
- **Orthodontist** Specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of malocclusions of teeth and jaw. This is achieved by braces and other fixed or removable appliances or retainers.
- **Prosthodontist** A dentist who specializes in replacement of teeth with dentures and implants. This specialist can work with patients with head and neck irregularities by replacing missing parts of the face and jaw with artificial substitutes.
- **Dental Public Health Dentists** focus on achieving optimal dental health by treating communities, rather than at the individual patient level. Public health dentists persuade communities to adopt better oral health policies, such as water fluoridation, improve a community's understanding of the importance of self-care, accessing professional care, healthy eating, and other concepts that have the power to keep diseases at bay. They also work on health issues that connect oral health with overall health and wellness and strive to eliminate the barriers that negatively impact health. Public health dentists work towards society's established health goals and objectives, such as [Healthy People 2030](#).

Illinois Dental Schools

- **University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry**, Chicago
- **Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine**, Downers Grove
- **Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine**, Alton

Registered Dental Hygienist

A dental hygienist will clean teeth, take X-rays, evaluate and treat for gum infection and periodontal disease, and place sealants and fluoride. Providing home care instructions for dental care is also an important part of the dental hygienist's role. To become a dental hygienist after completing high school, you must graduate from a college dental hygiene program. There are 13 colleges in Illinois with dental hygiene programs. Learn more about the career of dental hygiene [here](#).

Job Outlook

Employment of dental hygienists is projected to grow 6% from 2019 to 2029, faster than the average for all occupations. The demand for dental services is expected to increase as the population ages and as research continues to link oral health to overall health.

Pay

The median annual wage for dental hygienists was \$76,220 in May 2019.

Specialized Dental Hygienist A registered dental hygienist who has undergone additional training to specialize in an area of treatment.

- **Public Health Dental Hygienist** A public health dental hygienist can treat patients without prior examination by a dentist. In order to for this to occur, the hygienist must have a written supervision agreement with a licensed dentist while working in an approved facility or program that allows the hygienist to treat patients without seeing a dentist first. *Note: this mid-level dental provider is within the scope of practice in Illinois.*
- **Dental Therapist** They provide direct dental care for a range of dental health issues. Their duties can include removing teeth or providing treatments to teeth to improve their health. *Note: this mid-level dental provider is not within the scope of practice in Illinois.*
- **Advanced dental hygiene therapist (ADHP)** They provide the same services as a registered dental hygienist. This may include cleaning and examining patients' teeth and gums, checking for oral abnormalities, and educating patients on how to maintain proper oral hygiene between visits. However, as an ADHP, typical daily tasks may also extend to minimally invasive restorative procedures, and may also be given the ability, though limited, to write prescriptions. *Note: this mid-level dental provider is not within the scope of practice in Illinois.*

Illinois Accredited Dental Hygiene Schools can be found [here](#):

Dental Assistant

The duties of a dental assistant are among the most comprehensive and varied in the dental office. The dental assistant performs tasks requiring both interpersonal and technical skills. Dental assistants can become certified through a dental assisting program or can be trained on the job. Learn more about a career in dental assisting [here](#).

Pay

The median annual wage for dental assistants was \$40,080 in May 2019.

Job Outlook

Employment of dental assistants is projected to grow 7% from 2019 to 2029, faster than the average for all occupations. The aging population and ongoing research linking oral health and general health is expected to increase the demand for preventive dental services.

Specialized Dental Assistant

- **Expanded Function Dental Assistant** An expanded function dental assistant, or EFDA, is a dental assistant with extra responsibilities and duties. They have more training and additional licenses or certifications than dental assistants and are permitted to perform coronal polishing, take impressions, and apply sealants or topical anesthetic.

Dental Lab Technician

Dental laboratory technology is both a science and an art. Since each dental patient's needs are different, the duties of a dental laboratory technician are comprehensive and varied. Although dental technicians seldom work directly with patients, except under the direction of a licensed dentist, they are valuable members of the dental care team. Dental laboratory technicians can go through an accredited program or be trained on the job. Learn more about a career as a dental lab technician [here](#).

Pay

The median annual wage for dental and ophthalmic laboratory technicians and medical appliance technicians was \$37,370 in May 2019.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of dental laboratory technicians and medical appliance technicians is projected to grow 9% from 2019 to 2029, much faster than the average for all occupations. As cosmetic prosthetics, such as veneers and crowns, become less expensive there likely will be an increase in demand for these appliances.

Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC)

In response to this lack of access to available dentists, the American Dental Association launched the Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC) program in 2006 to provide community-based prevention, care coordination, and patient navigation to connect people who typically do not receive care from a dentist in underserved rural, urban, and Native American communities. CDHCs must complete an approved training program. Learn more about a career as a CDHC [here](#).

Pay

The CDHC mirrors that of the community health coordinator (CHC) but is specialized to dentistry. The median wage would mirror the CHC's median wage of \$45,179.

Job Outlook

The CDHC is a new oral health care provider to join the oral health team. The CDHC model has been adapted to numerous community settings, including clinics, private practices, schools, Head Start centers, institutional settings, churches, social service agencies, and others. This career field is growing and is an opportunity for those passionate about bringing care to the underserved in their community. See testimonials for CDHC [here](#). Find opportunities for CDHC [here](#). *Note: this mid-level dental provider now provides services in 47 states but is projected to be in all 50.*

Resources:

Occupational Outlook Handbook - Bureau of Labor Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

U.S. Dental Schools

<https://www.asdanet.org/index/get-into-dental-school/before-you-apply/u-s-dental-schools>

Oral Answers

<http://www.oralanswers.com/the-nine-dental-specialties-what-you-should-know/>

American Dental Hygienist Association

https://www.adha.org/resources-docs/71617_Entry_Level_Schools_By_States.pdf

RDH Magazine – The ADHP initiative: a national overview

<https://www.rdhmag.com/career-profession/personal-wellness/article/16405120/the-adhp-initiative-a-national-overview>

American Dental Association

<https://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/careers-in-dentistry/dental-team-careers/dental-assistant>

American Dental Association

<https://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/careers-in-dentistry/dental-team-careers/dental-laboratory-technology>

American Dental Association

<https://www.ada.org/en/public-programs/action-for-dental-health/community-dental-health-coordinators>

US bureau of Labor Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm>

Dental Assistants School

<https://dentalassistantedu.org/expanded-functions-dental-assistant/>

Payscale.com

https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Community_Health_Coordinator/Salary