

# Dental Hygienist

## **Professional Activities**

Dental hygienists remove soft and hard deposits from teeth, teach patients how to practice good oral hygiene, and provide other preventive dental care. They examine patients' teeth and gums, recording the presence of diseases or abnormalities.

Dental hygienists use an assortment of tools to complete their tasks. Hand and rotary instruments and ultrasonic devices are used to clean and polish teeth, which includes removing tartar, stains, and plaque. Hygienists use x-ray machines to take dental pictures, and sometimes develop the film. They may use models of teeth to explain oral hygiene, perform root planning as a periodontal therapy, or apply cavity-preventative agents such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants.

Dental hygienists also help patients develop and maintain good oral health. For example, they may explain the relationship between diet and oral health or inform patients how to select toothbrushes and show them how to brush and floss their teeth.

Hygienists sometimes work chair-side with the dentist during treatment.

Dental hygienists work in clean, well-lighted offices. Important health safeguards include strict adherence to proper radiological procedures and the use of appropriate protective devices when administering anesthetic gas. Dental hygienists also wear safety glasses, surgical masks, and gloves to protect themselves and patients from infectious diseases. Dental hygienists also should be careful to avoid possible shoulder and neck injury from sitting for long periods of time while working with patients.

Flexible scheduling is a distinctive feature of this job. Full-time, part-time, evening, and weekend schedules are common. Dentists frequently hire hygienists to work only 2 or 3 days a week, so hygienists may hold jobs in more than one dental office.

## **Educational Requirements**

A degree from an accredited dental hygiene school and a State license are required for this job.

Most dental hygiene programs grant an associate degree, although some also offer a certificate, a bachelor's degree, or a master's degree. A minimum of an associate degree or certificate in dental hygiene is generally required for practice in a private dental office. A bachelor's or master's degree usually is required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs.

About half of the dental hygiene programs prefer applicants who have completed at least 1 year of college. However, requirements vary from one school to another. Schools offer laboratory, clinical, and classroom instruction in subjects such as anatomy, physiology, chemistry, microbiology, pharmacology, nutrition, radiography, histology (the study of tissue structure), periodontology (the study of gum diseases), pathology, dental materials, clinical dental hygiene, and social and behavioral sciences.

Dental hygienists must be licensed by the State in which they practice. Nearly all States require candidates to graduate from an accredited dental hygiene school and pass both a written and clinical examination.

## Academic Programs

[Carl Sandburg College](#)  
[College of DuPage](#)  
[College of Lake County](#)  
[Harper College](#)  
[Illinois Central College](#)  
[Lake Land College](#)  
[Lewis and Clark Community College](#)

[Lewis University](#)  
[Parkland College](#)  
[Prairie State College](#)  
[Rock Valley College](#)  
[Southeastern Illinois College](#)  
[Southern Illinois University](#)

## Employment/Salary Outlook

Projected growth ranks dental hygienists among the fastest growing occupations, in response to increasing demand for dental care and more use of hygienists.

Job prospects are expected to be favorable in most areas but will vary by geographical location. Because graduates are permitted to practice only in the State in which they are licensed, hygienists wishing to practice in areas that have an abundance of dental hygiene programs may experience strong competition for jobs.

## State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$28.90	\$37.41	\$48.18
	Annual	\$60,100	\$77,810	\$100,200
Illinois	Hourly	\$29.25	\$37.15	\$47.56
	Annual	\$60,840	\$77,270	\$98,920

## State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	<a href="#">Job Openings</a> <sup>1</sup>
	2020	2030		
Dental Hygienists	206,100	229,200	11%	15,600
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	<a href="#">Job Openings</a> <sup>1</sup>
	2018	2028		
Dental Hygienists	9,440	9,950	+5%	700

<sup>1</sup>Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

## Professional Organizations

American Dental Association ([ada.org](http://ada.org))  
American Dental Hygienists' Association ([adha.org](http://adha.org))

## References

*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics  
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dental-hygienists>)

O\*NET OnLine (<http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-2021.00>)

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