

Practice of a Dental Hygienist under Remote Supervision

Remote supervision is defined in [18VAC60-21-10](#).

Where can remote supervision be practiced?

[Virginia Code § 54.1-2722](#) addresses where remote supervision may be practiced:

- **Subsection E** permits a dental hygienist employed by VDH to practice under the remote supervision of a public health dentist in providing hygiene treatment in VDH public health facilities.
- **Subsection E** also permits a dental hygienist employed by DBHDS to practice under the remote supervision of a DBHDS dentist in providing hygiene treatment in DBHDS's mobile/remote supervision program.
- **Subsection F** permits a qualified dental hygienist to practice under the remote supervision of a qualified dentist at a federally qualified health center; charitable safety net facility; free clinic; long-term care facility; elementary or secondary school; Head Start program; mobile dentistry program for adults with developmental disabilities operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services' Office of Integrated Health; or women, infants, and children ("WIC") program.

Who can supervise a dental hygienist's practice of dental hygiene under remote supervision?

[Virginia Code § 54.1-2722](#) addresses supervision:

- **Subsection E** requires that the supervising dentist be an employee of VDH or an employee of DBHDS.
- **Subsection F** requires that the supervising dentist have an active license issued by the Virginia Board of Dentistry and have a dental practice physically located in the Commonwealth. In addition to a physically-located dental practice, the Board has determined that such a dentist, who practices in Virginia as either an employee or a volunteer in a federally qualified health center, charitable safety net facility, free clinic, long-term care facility, elementary or secondary school, Head Start program, or women, infants, and children (WIC) program, including a mobile dental clinic or portable dental operation that is operated by one of these settings, would qualify as having a dental practice physically located in the Commonwealth.

What qualifications are necessary for a dental hygienist to practice under remote supervision?

The hygienist must have (i) completed a continuing education course designed to develop the competencies needed to provide care under remote supervision offered by an accredited dental education program or from a continuing education provider approved by the Board and (ii) at least two years of clinical experience, consisting of at least 2,500 hours. See [Va. Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#).

What is required for a continuing education course in remote supervision?

[Virginia Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#) and [18VAC60-25-190\(H\)](#) require a remote supervision course to be no less than two hours in duration and to be offered by an accredited dental education program or an approved sponsor listed in the regulation. The required course content includes: a) intent and definitions of remote supervision; b) review of dental hygiene scope of practice and delegation of services; c) administration of controlled substances; d) patient records/documentation/risk management; e) remote supervision laws for dental hygienists and dentists; f) written practice protocols; and g) settings allowed for remote supervision.

Are there other requirements for practice under remote supervision?

[Virginia Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#) requires a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision to have professional liability insurance with policy limits acceptable to the supervising dentist.

In what settings can a dental hygienist practice under remote supervision?

A hygienist can only practice dental hygiene under remote supervision at a federally qualified health center, charitable safety net facility, free clinic, long-term care facility, elementary or secondary school, Head Start program, or women, infants, and children (WIC) program, including a mobile facility or portable dental operation that is operated by one of these settings. See [Va. Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#).

What tasks can a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision perform?

A hygienist practicing under remote supervision may (a) obtain a patient's treatment history and consent, (b) perform an oral assessment, (c) perform scaling and polishing, (d) perform all educational and preventative services, (e) take X-rays as ordered by the supervising dentist or consistent with a standing order, (f) maintain appropriate documentation in the patient's chart, (g) administer Schedule VI topical drugs including topical oral fluorides, topical oral anesthetics and topical and directly applied antimicrobial agents pursuant to Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(J), and (h) perform any other service ordered by the supervising dentist or required by statute or Board regulation. See [Va. Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#).

Under the provisions of [Virginia Code § 54.1-3408\(V\)](#), a dental hygienist is authorized to possess and administer topical fluoride varnish pursuant to an oral or written order or a standing protocol issued by a dentist or a doctor of medicine or osteopathic medicine.

Is the dental hygienist allowed to administer local anesthetic or nitrous oxide?

A dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision is not allowed to administer local anesthetic parenterally or to administer nitrous oxide under [Virginia Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#).

What disclosures and permissions are required under law?

Prior to providing a patient dental hygiene services, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision shall obtain (1) the patient's or the patient's legal representative's signature on a statement disclosing that the delivery of dental hygiene services under remote supervision is not a substitute for the need for regular dental examinations by a dentist and (2) verbal confirmation from the patient that he does not have a dentist of record whom he is seeing regularly. See [Va. Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#).

How is the dental hygienist required to involve the dentist when practicing under remote supervision?

[Virginia Code § 54.1-2722](#) addresses involvement of the dentist when practicing under remote supervision. That statute allows that, after conducting an initial oral assessment of a patient, a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision may provide further dental hygiene services following a written practice protocol developed and provided by the supervising dentist. Under the statute, the written practice protocol must consider, at a minimum, the medical complexity of the patient and the presenting signs and symptoms of oral disease.

The statute requires that a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision inform the supervising dentist of all findings for a patient and allows a dental hygienist practicing under remote supervision to continue to treat a patient for 180 days. The statute requires that, after the 180-day period, the supervising dentist, absent emergent circumstances, must either conduct an examination of the patient or refer the patient to another dentist to conduct an examination. The supervising dentist is required to develop a diagnosis and treatment plan for the patient and either the supervising dentist or the dental hygienist provide the treatment plan to the patient. The statute additionally requires the supervising dentist to review a patient's records at least once every 10 months.

Can a dental hygienist see a patient beyond 180 days if the patient has not seen a dentist?

This may only occur if the supervising dentist authorizes treatment to address an emergent circumstance requiring dental hygiene treatment. The written practice protocol developed by the supervising dentist provides the initial authorization for a hygienist to provide hygiene treatment under remote supervision for 180 days of treatment. After that 180 day period (absent emergent circumstances), the supervising dentist (or another dentist) must examine the patient, develop a diagnosis and establish the treatment plan for the patient which might address both future dental treatment and dental hygiene treatment and the time spans for such treatment. The dentist decides how often he or she will see a patient in accord with his professional judgment of the patient's dental needs and the resulting treatment plan. In addition, by statute the dentist must review the patient's records at a minimum of every 10 months. Treatment planning and record review are two distinct requirements.

Is a dental hygienist who is practicing under remote supervision allowed to also practice dental hygiene under general supervision whether as an employee or as a volunteer?

Yes. [Virginia Code § 54.1-2722\(F\)](#) specifically states that “nothing in this subsection shall prevent a dental hygienist from practicing dental hygiene under general supervision whether as an employee or as a volunteer.”

Are the requirements for remote supervision different for a public health dental hygienist employed by the Virginia Department of Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services?

Yes, remote supervision in a public health setting is defined in [Virginia Code § 54.1-2722\(E\)](#).

References

[Va. Code § 54.1-2722](#)

[Va. Code § 54.1-3408](#)

[18VAC60-21-10](#)

[18VAC60-25-190](#)