

RESEARCH BRIEF

Dental Providers Offer a Key Access Point for COVID-19 Booster Shots

**Survey suggests many dental professionals are willing to play this role
to help protect against the virus**

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Methodology

The CareQuest Institute for Oral Health assembled a research panel of DentaQuest-enrolled providers to conduct a series of quarterly surveys to further examine the trends, patterns, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in dentistry. The request to join the research panel was sent to 22,075 providers. Of these, 575 providers agreed to participate in the panel and were eligible for participation, for a participation rate of 2.5%. Eligibility was assessed by age (18+) and having a high degree of familiarity with their dental office's patient volume, staffing, dental insurance carriers, treatment protocols, and the office's pre-and post-COVID finances. The research panel is substantially similar to the population as a whole in terms of geographic distribution, specialty, and gender.

The results in this report come from the first quarterly survey, which was fielded from March 9 to April 2, 2021. Up to four reminders were sent to prompt completion. A total of 377 dental providers partially or fully completed the survey, for a response rate of 63% of the research panel.



The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating. More than [564,000 Americans](#) have died from complications caused by the virus. Millions have lost their jobs. Although the proportion of vaccinated people is steadily growing, our nation must be prepared for the potential of future COVID-19 variants to precipitate a new round of health and economic havoc. Political and public health leaders should recognize that dental providers can play a helpful role by administering booster shots that reduce Americans' future vulnerability to COVID-19 or new variants.

The CEO of Pfizer, which has produced one of the most widely used vaccines, recently said it is a "likely scenario" that recipients will [need a third dose](#) or so-called booster shot within 12 months of receiving the second dose in order to sustain sufficient immunity from COVID-19. [Moderna expects](#) to have a booster shot ready for rollout by this autumn. Getting this booster shot into arms quickly and efficiently will be crucial — and dental providers should be part of this effort.

Although the leading vaccines used for COVID-19 require refrigeration, there are ways for dental offices to address this logistical hurdle. For example, the Centers for [Disease Control and Prevention](#) reports that household-grade refrigerators "can be an acceptable alternative to pharmaceutical-grade vaccine storage units" and offers other guidance on where and how vaccines should be stored. Where that is not possible, federal or state agencies could purchase pharmaceutical-grade refrigeration units and make them available to dental and medical practices. Experts say these units can be produced in compact, under-the-counter sizes that many dental offices could accommodate.

The Pandemic's Impact:

- At least 43,000 children have had at least one parent die from the virus.
- During the first seven months of the COVID-19 outbreak, 1 in 4 adults said either they or someone in their household lost their job because of the pandemic.
- School closures have disrupted learning and led to sharp declines in student enrollment. In Michigan, for example, 13,000 school-age children are unaccounted for.

How Dental Providers Can Help

According to a recent analysis, each year [more than 19 million Americans](#) visit a dentist but do not see a primary care physician or another medical provider. For these people, dental offices can be important access points for certain annual preventive services, including vaccines and booster shots.

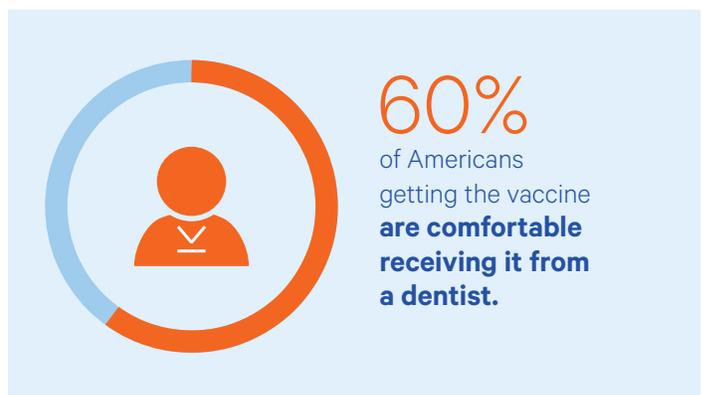
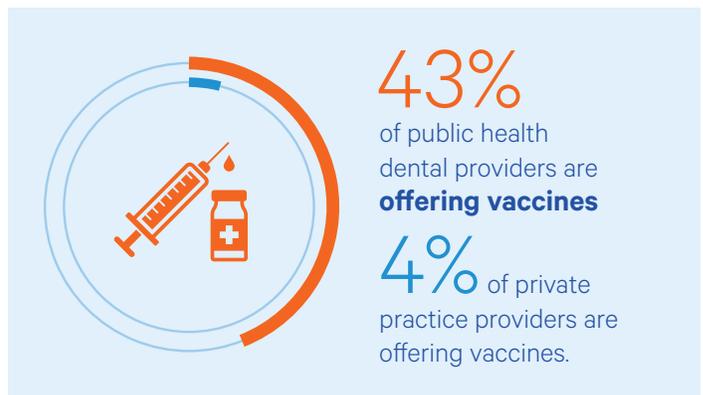
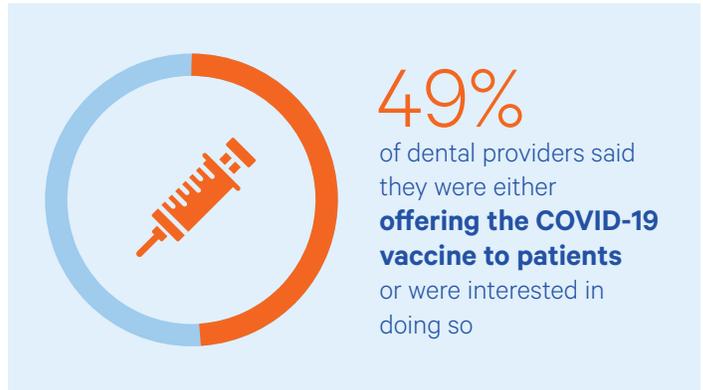
A recent survey of DentaQuest-enrolled providers by the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health suggests that many dental providers would be willing to serve as an additional access point for booster vaccinations. In the survey, roughly half (49%) of dental providers said they were either offering the COVID-19 vaccine to patients or were interested in doing so.

In the survey, dental providers in public health settings were much more likely (43%) to be offering vaccines than were providers in private practice (4%). The low participation rate of private practice providers should not be interpreted as a reluctance to administer vaccines, since 44% of private practice providers expressed interest in offering the vaccines but were not already doing so.

A separate survey recently showed that Americans would be [receptive to dentists administering booster shots](#). Among those who said they were willing to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, 60% said they would feel comfortable receiving it from a dentist.

These survey findings demonstrate both the willingness of dental providers to administer the COVID-19 vaccine and subsequent boosters and the public's positive interest in receiving these shots from a dentist. This will lead to a more efficient rollout and reception of the vaccine/booster from dental providers and move Americans one step closer to returning to normal life.

Patients and providers agree that dentists can play an important role in COVID-19 vaccine distribution.



CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

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