

[Why Dental Hygiene Is So Lucrative In Canada](#)

Everyone loves a winning smile. It's a symbol of success as well as physically appealing to look at. This probably explains North America's fixation with brushing, flossing, whitening and gargling; everyone aspires to those shiny pearly whites.

Chances are this isn't going to change anytime soon. In light of the current recession, job security is at the top of everyone's priority list. If you're looking for job security, look no further than a career in dental hygiene.

Becoming A Dental Hygienist

Canada has a wealth of options for the post-secondary student looking to pursue a career in dental hygiene. From the University of British Columbia to Dalhousie University, schools across the country offer programs in dental hygiene.

To pursue a degree in dental hygiene, students generally must have the following secondary school credits or International Baccalaureate / Advanced Placement (IB/AP) equivalents in order to qualify for an admission to first year:

English 11, English 12, A Grade 11 language course, Biology 11, Biology 12, Chemistry 11, Chemistry 12, Principles of Mathematics 11, Social Studies 11 or First Nations Studies 12, One other approved provincially examinable Grade 12 course.

What To Expect

Dental hygienists are registered and certified health professionals trained to maintain your oral integrity. Specializing in the prevention of oral health problems and mouth diseases, dental hygienists work with individual clients or communities to prevent tooth, gum and mouth diseases and injuries that can affect a patient's overall health.

One of the interesting aspects of being a dental hygienist is the range of the patient base. Dental hygiene services are provided to people of all ages, ranging from parents in pre-natal classes to the elderly in long-term health care centres. A typical workday could involve assessment, planning, implementing and evaluating health care data and include:

Teaching an elementary class about oral health care, Counseling a family about oral health, Providing fluoride treatments to patients during a dental visit, Administering local anesthetic for dental hygiene or dental treatment, Teaching long-term care staff about mouth care for their clients, Working with nurses to prevent sports and playground injuries, Screening seniors for signs of oral cancer, Performing head, neck and oral examinations, Applying pit and fissure sealants to teeth, Reviewing literature and conducting research, Scaling, root-planning, and so on.

Preventive health care is another part of a dental hygienist's profession. Many dental hygienists deliver health promotion programs in their community to parent and special needs groups; schools, day cares and long-term seniors' care facilities. These programs usually include tobacco cessation advocacy, sports/mouth guard clinics and baby care seminars.

Practicing Dental Hygiene in Canada

In order to practice dental hygiene in Canada, registered dental hygienists (RDHs) must complete a recognized dental program, and be registered or licensed with the appropriate provincial or territorial regulatory authorities.

Clinical vs. Community Practice

Dental hygienists have the option of working in both community and clinical practices.

Clinical Practice

In clinical practice, dental hygienists most often work with general practitioner dentists or specialty practice dentists. They work directly with patients to prevent and treat gum disease and tooth decay. They are trained to:

Assess tooth and gum health, Prepare individualized dental hygiene treatment plans, refer patients to a dentist for dental treatment.

The role of the clinical dental hygienist is not solely limited to looking after the cosmetic appearance of teeth and gums, but also perform complex

services like scaling and root planning to treat gum infections.

Some Canadian provinces allow dental hygienists to own their own dental hygiene practice. For example, RDHs can practice independently in British Columbia, Ontario and some American states. Increasingly, as more provincial/territorial legislation allows dental hygienists to open their own clinical practice, entrepreneurial skills are becoming more important for dental hygienists.

Community Practice

Dental hygienists working in community practices varies in scope. They may work with individuals on a one-to-one basis, or deal with entire communities. Dental hygienists may perform health surveys for a community and work with other health professionals to design a health program for those communities.

They often evaluating the effectiveness of current health care procedures and programs while identifying the need for ones. A dental hygienist will work with a variety of health professionals and community members including nurses, speech pathologists, injury prevention coordinators, dentists, physicians and dietitians.

Community members may include school principals, teachers, parents, coaches, day care providers, health advocates, government departments, and administrators of other health promotion programs in the community.

Some dental hygienists choose to specialize in health programs for new Canadians, cancer (oncology) patients, expectant moms or homeless teens. Community health practice offers much variety to a dental hygiene career.

There are many interesting and exciting career opportunities for dental hygienists. Dental hygienists may find themselves with a variety of roles and responsibilities to choose from. These include roles as: Clinicians, Educators, Administrators, Researchers.

Depending on whether they choose to work in a clinical or community practice, dental hygienists may practice in a variety of environments such as: Private dental practices, Public health and community health centres, Professional dental hygiene associations and regulatory bodies, Homecare and outreach programs, Universities and community colleges, Government (policy and planning, lobbying), Industry (insurance and dental supply companies), Consulting, Research.

Salary

The median hourly wage of Canadian dental hygienists with less than one year of experience is roughly C\$ 31.16, according to PayScale.

Is Dental Hygiene Right For You?

Dental hygiene is a profession that offers job security as well as a wealth of different job opportunities. Graduates of post-secondary degree institutions have the option of working in either clinical or community practices, and with a wide range of clients.

The multitude of available roles leaves room career diversity for dental hygienists to hone their various skills. If this sounds appealing, than dental hygiene may just be the career to put a smile on your face.

About the Author

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