

Dental Assistant

Professional Activities

Dental assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties. They work chairside as dentists examine and treat patients. They make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain dental records. Assistants hand instruments and materials to dentists, and keep patients' mouths dry and clear by using suction or other devices. Assistants also sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general oral health care.

Those with laboratory duties make casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions taken by dentists, clean and polish removable appliances, and make temporary crowns. Dental assistants with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive payments, and order dental supplies and materials.

Dental assistants should not be confused with dental hygienists, who are licensed to perform different clinical tasks.

Dental assistants work in a well-lighted, clean environment. Their work area is usually near the dental chair so that they can arrange instruments, materials, and medication and hand them to the dentist when needed. Dental assistants wear uniforms, as well as gloves, masks, eyewear, and protective clothing to protect themselves and their patients from infectious diseases. Following safety procedures also minimizes the risks associated with the use of radiographic equipment.

Almost half of dental assistants have a 35 to 40 hour work week, which may include work on Saturdays or evenings.

Educational Requirements

Many assistants learn their skills on the job, although an increasing number are trained in dental-assisting programs offered by community and junior colleges, trade schools, technical institutes, or the Armed Forces. Most programs take 1 year to complete. For assistants to perform more advanced functions, or to have the ability to complete radiological procedures, many States require assistants to obtain a license or certification.

A period of on-the-job training is often required even for those who have completed a dental-assisting program or have some previous experience. Different dentists may have their own styles of doing things that need to be learned before an assistant can be comfortable working with them. Office-specific information, such as where files and instruments are kept, will need to be learned at each new job. Also, as dental technology changes, dental assistants need to stay familiar with the instruments and procedures that they will be using or helping dentists to use. On-the-job training may be sufficient to keep assistants up-to-date on these matters.

Academic Programs

[Elgin Community College](#)

[John A. Logan College](#)

[Kaskaskia College](#)

[Lewis & Clark Community College](#)

[Wilbur Wright College](#)

[Illinois Valley Community College](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Employment is expected to grow 36 percent from 2008 to 2018, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. In fact, dental assistants are expected to be among the fastest growing occupations over the 2008–18 projection period. Population growth, greater retention of natural teeth by middle-aged and older people, and an increased focus on preventative dental care for younger generations will fuel demand for dental services.

Job prospects should be excellent, as dentists continue to need the aid of qualified dental assistants. There will be many opportunities for entry-level positions, but some dentists prefer to hire experienced

assistants, those who have completed a dental-assisting program, or have met State requirements to take on expanded functions within the office.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2009				
		10%	25%	Median	75%	90%
United States	Hourly	\$10.92	\$13.23	\$15.98	\$19.12	\$22.63
	Yearly	\$22,700	\$27,500	\$33,200	\$39,800	\$47,100
Illinois	Hourly	\$11.56	\$13.41	\$15.62	\$18.18	\$21.03
	Yearly	\$24,000	\$27,900	\$32,500	\$37,800	\$43,700

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	<u>Job Openings</u> ¹
	2008	2018		
Dental assistants	295,300	400,900	+36%	16,100
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	<u>Job Openings</u> ¹
	2008	2018		
Dental assistants	12,400	16,020	+29%	600

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

Professional Information

American Dental Association
 211 East Chicago Ave.
 Chicago, IL 60611-2678
 312 - 440 - 2500
<http://www.ada.org>

Phone: 312-541-1550
 Fax: 312-541-1496
<http://www.dentalassistant.org/>

American Dental Assistants Association
 35 East Wacker Drive Suite 1730
 Chicago IL 60601-2211

Dental Assisting National Board, Inc.,
 444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 900
 Chicago, Illinois 60611
 Telephone: 312-642-3368
 Fax: 312-642-8507
<http://www.danb.org>

References

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition, Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos096.htm>

O*NET OnLine, on the Internet at <http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-2012.00>

Date Last Modified: May 5, 2011