

Definitions of emergency, urgent and non-essential care

May 22, 2020

What is an emergency?

In dentistry, an emergency is a potentially life-threatening condition that requires immediate treatment, including:

- oral-facial trauma
- cellulitis or other significant infection, especially if compromising the patient's airway
- prolonged bleeding
- pain that cannot be managed by over-the-counter medications

What is urgent care?

In dentistry, urgent care is the management and treatment of conditions that require immediate attention to relieve pain and/or risk of infection, including:

- severe dental pain from pulpal inflammation
- pericoronitis or third-molar pain
- surgical post-operative osteitis, dry socket dressing changes
- abscess or localized bacterial infection resulting in localized pain and swelling
- tooth fracture resulting in pain, pulp exposure or causing soft tissue trauma
- extensive caries or defective restorations causing pain
- dental trauma with avulsion/luxation

- final crown/bridge cementation if the temporary restoration is lost, broken or causing gingival irritation
- biopsy of a suspicious oral lesion or abnormal oral tissue
- replacing a temporary filling in an endodontic access opening for patients experiencing pain
- snipping or adjusting an orthodontic wire or appliance piercing or ulcerating the oral mucosa
- treatment required before critical medical procedures can be provided
- suture removal
- denture adjustments or repairs when function is impeded
- other procedures that in the dentist's professional judgement are necessary in order to minimize harm to patients and/or relieve pain and suffering

What is non-essential care?

In dentistry, non-essential care is the provision of routine or non-urgent procedures, including:

- recall examinations and routine radiographs
- routine dental cleanings and preventive therapies
- orthodontic procedures other than those to address acute issues (e.g. pain, infection, trauma)
- extraction of asymptomatic teeth
- restorative dentistry, including treatment of asymptomatic carious lesions
- cosmetic dental procedures, including teeth whitening



Royal College of
Dental Surgeons of Ontario