

CAREER GUIDE FOR DENTAL HYGIENISTS

SOC Code: 29-2021

Pay Band(s): 4 and 5 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Clean teeth and examine oral areas, head, and neck for signs of oral disease. May educate patients on oral hygiene, take and develop X-rays, or apply fluoride or sealants.

Dental Hygienists positions in the Commonwealth are assigned to the following Roles in the [Health Care Technology Career Group](#):

[Health Care Technologist II](#)

[Health Care Manager](#)

While Dental Hygienists within the Commonwealth are all located within the Health Care Technology Career Group, individuals may want to pursue other opportunities within the Commonwealth depending upon individual training, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests.

Other Career Group(s) that may be of interest are:

[Laboratory and Research Services](#)

[Dental Services](#)

[Direct Services](#)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND TASKS

(Technical and Functional Expertise)

Skills

Note: *The technical and functional skills listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Dental Hygienists commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the skills listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

1. Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
2. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
3. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
4. Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem solving and decision-making.
5. Managing one's own time and the time of others.
6. Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
7. Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
8. Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
9. Teaching others how to do something.
10. Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.

Knowledge

Note: *The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Dental Hygienists commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the knowledge listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

The **Knowledge** of:

1. Information and techniques needed to diagnose and treat human injuries, diseases, and deformities. This includes symptoms, treatment alternatives, drug properties and interactions, and preventive health-care measures.
2. Principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
3. Plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
4. Principles and methods for curriculum and training design, teaching and instruction for individuals and groups, and the measurement of training effects.
5. Structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
6. Human behavior and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioral and affective disorders.
7. Principles and methods for showing, promoting, and selling products or services. This includes marketing strategy and tactics, product demonstration, sales techniques, and sales control systems.
8. Relevant equipment, policies, procedures, and strategies to promote effective local, state, or national security operations for the protection of people, data, property, and institutions.
9. Raw materials, production processes, quality control, costs, and other techniques for maximizing the effective manufacture and distribution of goods.

Abilities

Note: *The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Dental Hygienists commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the abilities listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

The **Ability** to:

1. Make precisely coordinated movements of the fingers of one or both hands to grasp, manipulate, or assemble very small objects.
2. See details at close range (within a few feet of the observer).
3. Quickly move your hand, your hand together with your arm, or your two hands to grasp, manipulate, or assemble objects.
4. Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.
5. Keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.
6. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.

7. Quickly and repeatedly adjust the controls of a machine or a vehicle to exact positions.
8. Speak clearly so others can understand you.
9. Concentrate on a task over a period of time without being distracted.
10. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.

Tasks

Note: *The following is a list of sample tasks typically performed by Dental Hygienists. Employees in this occupation will not necessarily perform all of the tasks listed.*

1. Clean calcareous deposits, accretions, and stains from teeth and beneath margins of gums, using dental instruments.
2. Feel and visually examine gums for sores and signs of disease.
3. Chart conditions of decay and disease for diagnosis and treatment by dentist.
4. Feel lymph nodes under patient's chin to detect swelling or tenderness that could indicate presence of oral cancer.
5. Apply fluorides and other cavity preventing agents to arrest dental decay.
6. Examine gums, using probes, to locate periodontal recessed gums and signs of gum disease.
7. Expose and develop x-ray film.
8. Provide clinical services and health education to improve and maintain oral health of school children.
9. Remove excess cement from coronal surfaces of teeth.
10. Make impressions for study casts.

INTERESTED?

Like people, occupations have traits or characteristics. These characteristics give important clues about the nature of the work and work environment, and give you an opportunity to match your own personal interests to a specific occupation. When you choose a job in an occupation that matches your own interests you have taken an important step in planning a successful and rewarding career.

The occupation of dental hygiene has the following characteristics:

Social — Social occupations frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others.

Conventional — Conventional occupations frequently involve following set procedures and routines. These occupations can include working with data and details more than with ideas. Usually there is a clear line of authority to follow.

Realistic — Realistic occupations frequently involve work activities that include practical, hands-on problems and solutions. They often deal with plants, animals, and real-world materials like wood, tools, and machinery. Many of the occupations require working outside, and do not involve a lot of paperwork or working closely with others.

Enterprising — Enterprising occupations frequently involve starting up and carrying out projects. These occupations can involve leading people and making many decisions. Sometimes they require risk taking and often deal with business.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

It is nationally recognized that dental services is a health field career and is regulated to ensure competent delivery of health care services to citizens. Therefore professional standards and competencies including licensure are expected.

Dental Hygienists must be licensed by the State in which they practice. To qualify for licensure, a candidate must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene school and pass both a written and clinical examination. The American Dental Association Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations administers the written examination, which is accepted by all States and the District of Columbia. State or regional testing agencies administer the clinical examination. In addition, most States require an examination on the legal aspects of dental hygiene practice.

Licensure is required for Dental Hygienists positions in Virginia State government. The Virginia Board of Dentistry provides requirements for licensure and continuing competency for this occupation. Licensing information for Dental Hygienists can be found on the Department of Health Professions web site at <http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/>

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics provides the following information:

Dental hygienists remove soft and hard deposits from teeth, teach patients how to practice good oral hygiene, and provide other preventive dental care. Hygienists examine patients' teeth and gums, recording the presence of diseases or abnormalities. They remove calculus, stains, and plaque from teeth; perform root planing as a periodontal therapy; take and develop dental x rays; and apply cavity-preventive agents such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants. In some States, hygienists administer anesthetics; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; and smooth and polish metal restorations. Although hygienists may not diagnose diseases, they can prepare clinical and laboratory diagnostic tests for the dentist to interpret. Hygienists sometimes work chairside with the dentist during treatment.

Dental hygienists also help patients develop and maintain good oral health. For example, they may explain the relationship between diet and oral health or inform patients how to select toothbrushes and show them how to brush and floss their teeth.

Dental hygienists use hand and rotary instruments and ultrasonics to clean and polish teeth, x-ray machines to take dental pictures, syringes with needles to administer local anesthetics, and models of teeth to explain oral hygiene.

Most dental hygiene programs grant an associate degree, although some also offer a certificate, a bachelor's degree, or a master's degree. A minimum of an associate degree or certificate in dental hygiene is required for practice in a private dental office. A bachelor's or master's degree usually is required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs.

About half of the dental hygiene programs prefer applicants who have completed at least 1 year of college. However, requirements vary from one school to another. Schools offer laboratory, clinical, and classroom instruction in subjects such as anatomy, physiology, chemistry,

microbiology, pharmacology, nutrition, radiography, histology (the study of tissue structure), periodontology (the study of gum diseases), pathology, dental materials, clinical dental hygiene, and social and behavioral sciences.

Dental hygienists should work well with others and must have good manual dexterity, because they use dental instruments within a patient's mouth, with little room for error. High school students interested in becoming a dental hygienist should take courses in biology, chemistry, and mathematics.

The Virginia Area Health Education Center Program provides the following information:

Dental Hygienists receive their education through accredited academic programs at community colleges or universities. The majority of community college programs take two years to complete with graduates receiving associates degrees. This degree allows the hygienists to become eligible for the licensure examination. University-based dental hygienist programs may offer bachelor's and master's degrees, each requiring at least two additional years each of further schooling. These additional degrees are required for careers in teaching, research and public health programs.

Educational Institutions in Virginia that provide educational programs for dental hygienists are Lord Fairfax Community College, Northern Virginia Community College, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Highlands Community College, Virginia Western Community College and Wytheville Community College.

COMMONWEALTH COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a set of identified behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly and positively impact the success of employees and the organization. Competencies can be observed and measured. When consistently demonstrated, competencies make employees particularly effective in their work. Competencies help lay out a road map to career success. You can use the Commonwealth Competencies to help improve your individual performance by adopting behaviors that make high performing employees successful in their jobs. In this way, you can use the Commonwealth Competencies for your further professional development.

The Commonwealth Competencies are:

1. Technical and Functional Expertise
2. Understanding the Business
3. Achieving Results
4. Serving the Customer
5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
7. Leadership and Personal Effectiveness

The above competencies may be applied to employees throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be rank-ordered by agencies and hiring managers to represent the needs of a specific job. The rank ordering will change depending upon the occupation, an organization's priorities, the actual job requirements, and the supervisor's preferences.

Career success is both about what you do (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with others. Hopefully, by studying the Commonwealth competencies, identifying your developmental opportunities, and working to refine your own competence, you can take charge of your career!

For additional information about the **Commonwealth Competencies** go to: http://jobs.state.va.us/cc_planningctr.htm. For the competencies, we first list the competencies and then define each. Finally, we list competency indicators; to describe what successful performance looks like.

COMMONWEALTH CAREER PATH

Career opportunities in the Commonwealth are not limited to moving “up” to the next highest role and pay band, changing positions, or to becoming a supervisor. That’s because most roles describe a broad group of occupationally related positions that perform a range of work that requires increased knowledge and skills. For that reason, Commonwealth roles describe the career paths within the same or higher-level role for the same or different Career Group. The broad salary range and the Commonwealth’s pay practices provide flexibility in recognizing career development and advancement. ([Salary Structure](#))

For example: **Dentist Hygienist**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
4	Health Care Technologist II

PAY BAND	MANAGER ROLES
5	Health Care Manager

Sample Career Path

Health Care Technologist II

The Health Care Technologist II role also provides career tracks for dental hygienists that perform responsibilities ranging from entry-level to advance-level. The dental hygienists perform a range of duties ranging from taking x-rays to clinical treatment.

Health Care Manager

The Health Care Manager role provides career tracks for managers responsible for management, administration, and operation of a clinical laboratory or for the development, organization, and administration of a medical technology educational program.

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

O*NET (Occupational Information Network)
http://online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page

Virginia Employment Commission
<http://www.alex.vec.state.va.us/>

Career One Stop
<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Virginia Career Resource Network
<http://www.vacrn.net/>

Department of Health Professions
<http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/>

The U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
<http://www.bls.gov>

Virginia Area Health Education Centers Program
<http://www.ahec.vcu.edu/hcmanual.htm>

Professional Organizations

Virginia Dental Association
<http://www.vadental.org/>

Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association, Inc.
<http://www.rdh-vdha.org/>

American Dental Hygiene Association
<http://www.adha.org/>