



State of California

Employment Development Department

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Dental Hygienists in California

May also be called: Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH) and Hygienists.

What Would I Do?

Dental Hygienists are part of the dental care team that includes dentists, dental assistants, and dental hygienists working together to prevent and control gum disease and the development of

Dental Hygienists remove plaque and clean and polish teeth using scaling instruments. They also apply fluoride preventive agents such as fluorides and sealants, chart medical and dental x-ray films. They also screen patients, take a medical history, and add informa

Hygienists teach patients good oral hygiene practices and examine the mouth for signs of disease. They provide nutritional counseling and instruct patients on how to take care of their teeth s

Hygienists do not diagnose dental problems, but over time they have acquired skills to administer local anesthesia for pain control and prepare clinical and laboratory diagnostic tests. They are increasingly involved in periodontal therapies including root planing, micro-ultr

Dental Hygienists who are employed in public health agencies such as Indian Health Service programs help dentists assess dental care needs and plan appropriate dental field training for dental hygiene students. They also provide clinical services, e

Dental Hygienists who work in hospitals, clinics, and nursing and convalescent homes care for the oral problems of the patients. At colleges and universities, they engage in research programs, and may be employed as faculty members in dental schools.

IMPORTANT TASKS AND RELATED SKILLS

Each task below is matched to a sample skill required to carry out the task.

Task

Clean calcareous deposits, accretions, and stains from teeth and beneath margin of gums, using dental instruments.

Feel and visually examine gums for sores and signs of disease.

Chart conditions of decay and disease for diagnosis and treatment by dentist.

Feel lymph nodes under patient's chin to detect swelling or tenderness that could indicate presence of oral cancer.

Apply fluorides and other cavity preventing agents to arrest dental decay.

Examine gums, using probes, to locate periodontal recessed gums and signs of gum disease.

Expose and develop x-ray film.	Control Precision
Provide clinical services and health education to improve and maintain oral health of school children.	Education and Training
Remove excess cement from coronal surfaces of teeth.	Finger Dexterity
Make impressions for study casts.	Manual Dexterity

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [Occupational Information Network \(O*NET\)](#)

Working Conditions

Dental Hygienists work in pleasant, modern, well-lit, heated, and ventilated surroundings that usually have the latest dental equipment. Some of the locations in which they work include dentists' offices, armed forces bases, nursing and public health clinics.

While most of the time Dental Hygienists work sitting down, they can still develop back and neck pain. Repetitive and wrist movements used in their work may cause Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

Other hazards include exposure to infectious diseases and possible overexposure to radiation from x-rays. Risks minimized by using the appropriate safety gear such as masks, safety glasses, and special aprons. Important health protection in this occupation includes regular checkups and strict adherence to safety procedures for the use of x-equipment.

The work requires good vision (may be corrected) and finger dexterity for close attention to detail and handling of instruments. Constant work with other dental team members in a confined space is common.

It is common for Hygienists to work part-time in one dental office, and combine that with another part-time schedule in another office. A variety of schedules may be available, including full-time, part-time, evening, and weekend work.

Licensed Dental Hygienists are eligible to join the American Dental Hygienists Association and the California Dental Hygienists Association.

Will This Job Fit Me?

This occupation will likely interest you if you like helping people, enjoy detail work, like working with your hands, are adaptable, and are sensitive to the needs of others. This career involves making many decisions regarding patient care as well as decisions regarding billing, contracts with dentists, scheduling and more. The job can be routine, follow a set pattern of examination and cleaning.

What Wages and Benefits Can I Expect?

Dental Hygienists earn an excellent income, with median, full-time wages reaching almost \$80,000 per year.

WAGES

The median wage in 2014 for Dental Hygienists in California is \$100,312 annually, or \$48.23 hourly. The median is the point at which half of the workers earn more and half earn less.

Change to Hourly Wages

Annual Wages for 2014	Low (25th percentile)	Median (50th percentile)	High (75th percentile)
California	\$83,750	\$100,312	\$112,827

Source: EDD/LMID [Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, 2014](#) Wages do not reflect self-employment.

[View Wages for All Areas](#)

BENEFITS

Benefits usually include medical insurance, paid vacation, and sick leave - especially for full-time employees. Many employers provide retirement plans and discounts on dental work. Benefits vary substantially by practice setting and may be contingent upon full-time employment. Most full-time and part-time Dental Hygienists receive dental coverage.

What is the Job Outlook?

Employment may vary by geographic area and changes in the economy. Along with new jobs, the need to replace workers who retire, transfer to other occupations, or leave the labor force will increase the number of job openings.

PROJECTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

In California, the number of Dental Hygienists is expected to grow much faster than average growth rate for all occupations. Jobs for Dental Hygienists are expected to increase by 23.4 percent, or 5,100 jobs between 2012 and 2022.

Estimated Employment and Projected Growth Dental Hygienists

Geographic Area (Estimated Year-Projected Year)	Estimated Employment	Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change	Additional Openings Due to Net Replacements
California (2012-2022)	21,800	26,900	5,100	23.4	5,600

Source: EDD/LMID [Projections of Employment by Occupation](#)

[View Projected Growth for All Areas](#)

ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS

In California, an average of 510 new job openings per year is expected for Dental Hygienists, plus an additional 5 openings due to net replacement needs, resulting in a total of 1,060 job openings.

Estimated Average Annual Job Openings Dental Hygienists

Geographic Area (Estimated Year-Projected Year)	Jobs From Growth	Jobs Due to Net Replacements	Total Annual Job Openings
California (2012-2022)	510	560	1,060

Source: EDD/LMID [Projections of Employment by Occupation](#)

[View Data for All Areas](#)

How Do I Qualify?

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Dental Hygienists receive their education through academic programs at community colleges, technical colleges, schools, or universities. The majority of community college programs take at least two years to complete, with graduates receiving associate degrees. This degree allows a Hygienist to take licensure examinations (this includes both a written examination and a State clinical examination) and to work in a dental office. University-based dental hygiene programs may offer baccalaureate and master's degrees, which generally require at least two years of further schooling. These additional degrees may be required to embark on a career in teaching or research, as well as for clinical positions in school or public health programs.

Dental hygiene program admission requirements vary depending upon the specific school. Most programs show a preference for individuals who have completed at least one year of college. Some baccalaureate degree programs require that applicants complete two years of college prior to enrollment in the dental hygiene program. Counselors, advisors, and prospective students should contact the particular dental hygiene program of interest for specific program requirements.

Dental hygiene education programs provide students with clinical education in the form of supervised patient care experiences. Additionally, these programs include courses in liberal arts (e.g., English, speech, sociology, and psychology); basic sciences (e.g., anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, immunology, chemistry, microbiology, and pathology); and clinical sciences (e.g., dental hygiene, radiology, and dental materials).

EXPERIENCE

Experience is preferred, but not required, by employers. Extensive experience is often rewarded with better pay.

EARLY CAREER PLANNING

High school courses such as health, biology, English, psychology, chemistry, mathematics, and speech will be beneficial in a dental hygiene career.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Hygienists must complete 25 continuing education units every two years to meet state requirements.

LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION

To be licensed by the California Department of Consumer Affairs Committee on Dental Auxiliaries, the educational program must be approved by the American Dental Association (ADA). Contact the agency that issues the license for additional information. Click on the license title below for details.

- [Dental Hygienist - Extended Functions](#)
- [Dental Hygienist, Registered](#)
- [Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice \(RDHAP\)](#)

Prospective Registered Dental Hygienists must satisfy four requirements to be licensed in California:

- Graduate from an ADA-accredited hygiene program;
- Complete approved courses in the use of instruments to clean soft tissue (such as gums), administration of nitrous oxide, and administration of local anesthesia;
- Pass the national written examination; and
- Pass a clinical examination and examinations in Ethics and California Law administered by the Committee on Dental Auxiliaries (COMDA).

In addition, applicants must be fingerprinted. If a check reveals a criminal history, arrest and court records must be investigated, and a license may be denied on this basis. For more information, go to the U.S. Department of Labor's [InfoNet Web site](#) and scroll down to "Career Tools." Click on "[Certification Finder](#)" and follow the instructions to locate certification programs.

WHERE CAN I FIND TRAINING?

There are two ways to search for training information:

- [Search by Field of Study](#) to find what programs are available and what schools offer those programs. You may use keywords such as: Dental, Dental Hygiene, and Dental Hygienist.
- [Search by Training Provider](#) to find schools by name, type of school, or location.

Contact the schools you are interested in to learn about the classes available, tuition and fees, and any prerequisite course work.

Where Would I Work?

Most Dental Hygienists work in dentists offices, clinics, and community health programs. The largest industries for Dental Hygienists are as follows:

Industry Title

**Percent of Total
Employment for
Occupation in California**

Offices of Dentists

96.7%

Source: EDD/LMID Staffing Patterns

Finding a Job

Direct application to private dental offices is an excellent way of locating openings. Sometimes one dental office w of opportunities in another office. Private colleges and vocational schools may offer placement assistance, as do community colleges. Many employers recruit job applicants through newspaper advertisements.

Online job opening systems include JobCentral at www.jobcentral.com and CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov

To find your nearest One-Stop Career Center, go to [Service Locator](#). View the [helpful job search tips](#) for more res (requires [Adobe Reader](#)).

YELLOW PAGE HEADINGS

You can focus your local job search by checking employers listed online or in your local telephone directory. Below some suggested headings where you might find employers of Dental Hygienists.

- Dental Clinics
- Dentists
- Government (State, County, City)
- Hospitals

FIND POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS

To locate a list of employers in your area, go to "[Find Employers](#)" on the Labor Market Information Web site:

- Select one of the top industries that employ the occupation. This will give you a list of employers in that indust your area.
- Click on "View Filter Selections" to limit your list to specific cities or employer size.
- Click on an employer for the street address, telephone number, size of business, Web site, etc.
- Contact the employer for possible employment.

Where Could This Job Lead?

Depending upon the level of education and experience achieved, Dental Hygienists can also apply their skills and knowledge to other career activities such as teaching hygiene students in dental schools and dental hygiene educ programs. Research, office management, and business administration are other career options. Additionally, emp opportunities may be available with companies that market dental-related materials and equipment.

Related Occupations

Below is a list of occupations related to Dental Hygienists with links to more information.

Occupation	Occupational Guide	Industry Report	Occi F
Dental Assistants	Guide		
Medical Assistants	Guide		
Occupational Therapy Aides			F
Occupational Therapy Assistants			F
Physical Therapist Aides	Guide		
Physical Therapist Assistants	Guide		
Physician Assistants	Guide		
Radiologic Technologists and Technicians*	Guide		

Registered Nurses*
Respiratory Therapists

Guide

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Other Sources

- American Dental Hygienists' Association
www.adha.org
- American Dental Association
www.ada.org
- Dental Board of California
www.dbc.ca.gov

These links are provided for your convenience and do not constitute an endorsement by EDD.

For the Career Professional

The following codes are provided to assist counselors, job placement workers, or other career professionals.

System	Code
SOC - Standard Occupational Classification	29-2021
O*NET - Occupational Information Network	
Dental Hygienists	29-2021.00
Interest Codes (RIASEC)	SRC
CIP - Classification of Instructional Programs	
Dental Hygiene/Hygienist	510602
TOP - Taxonomy of Programs (California Community Colleges)	
Dental Hygienist	124020

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Dental Hygienists
Estimated Employment and Projected Growth

Geographic Area (Estimated Year-Projected Year)	Estimated Employment	Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change	Additional Openings Due to Net Replacements
California (2010-2020)	19,900	23,300	3,400	17.1	4,000
Butte County (2010-2020)	140	180	40	28.6	30
East Bay Area (2010-2020)	2,060	2,320	260	12.6	410
Eastern Sierra Region (2010-2020)	30	30		.0	10
Fresno County (2010-2020)	370	470	100	27.0	80
Inland Empire Area (2010-2020)	1,400	1,660	260	18.6	280
Kern County (2010-2020)	300	370	70	23.3	60
Kings County (2010-2020)	40	40		.0	10
Los Angeles County (2010-2020)	4,350	5,180	830	19.1	870
Madera County (2010-2020)	50	70	20	40.0	10
Merced County	130	170	40	30.8	30

(2010-2020)					
Mother Lode Region (2010-2020)	70	90	20	28.6	10
Napa County (2010-2020)	50	70	20	40.0	10
North Coast Region (2010-2020)	170	180	10	5.9	30
North Valley Region (2010-2020)	40	50	10	25.0	10
Northern Counties Region (2010-2020)	170	180	10	5.9	30
Orange County (2010-2020)	1,840	2,300	460	25.0	370
Sacramento Metro Area (2010-2020)	1,930	2,410	480	24.9	390
San Benito and Santa Clara Counties (2010-2020)	1,070	1,380	310	29.0	220
San Diego County (2010-2020)	1,350	1,610	260	19.3	270
San Francisco Bay Area (2010-2020)	1,030	1,210	180	17.5	210
San Joaquin County (2010-2020)	260	330	70	26.9	50
San Luis Obispo County	200	230	30	15.0	40

(2010-2020)					
Santa Barbara County (2010-2020)	250	310	60	24.0	50
Santa Cruz County (2010-2020)	230	290	60	26.1	50
Shasta County (2010-2020)	130	160	30	23.1	30
Sonoma County (2010-2020)	370	430	60	16.2	70
Stanislaus County (2010-2020)	330	370	40	12.1	70
Sutter and Yuba Counties (2010-2020)	40	40		.0	10
Tulare County (2010-2020)	180	230	50	27.8	40
Ventura County (2010-2020)	630	820	190	30.2	130

Source: Employment Development Department
 Labor Market Information Division
<https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>