

Information for oral health practitioners

When there are concerns about your health

The Dental Council's primary responsibility is to protect the health and safety of the public — but we are also here to support you when you face health challenges. Wherever possible, we want to help you continue practising safely, working alongside you and your healthcare team. This may sometimes involve adjusting your work or taking a temporary break until you are well enough to return safely.

If you or a colleague are experiencing physical or mental health difficulties — whether temporary or long-term — we encourage you to reach out. Early support can make a crucial difference.

At a glance

- ☐ **Notify early** about your own health or a colleague's
- ☐ **Seek advice** from your doctor, indemnity insurer, or professional association
- ☐ **Expect a fair process** with a case manager to support you
- ☐ **Stay involved** — provide information, respond to us, attend appointments, and make submissions when invited
- ☐ **Be aware** you may be required to undergo a health assessment
- ☐ **Know the outcomes** ranging from no action to conditions or suspension
- ☐ **Our goal** is to help you return to safe, quality practice



When health affects your practice

Health conditions that can affect your practice include:

- Physical or mental health conditions
- Substance dependence
- Serious infections or injuries.

Signs your health may be impacting your work:

- Difficulty making safe decisions
- Reduced skills or judgement
- Inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour
- Risk of transmitting infection

Why early intervention matters

It often allows you to continue working safely while receiving treatment, with minimal disruption.

Obligation to notify

Under the **Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003**:

- You must notify us if you believe your own health, or that of a colleague, may affect fitness to practise
- Employers and managers of health services must notify Council if they believe a practitioner's health is affecting their ability to practise safely.

Getting support

- Seek medical advice if unsure whether a health issue affects your ability to practise.
- Contact your professional indemnity insurer for support and guidance.
- Consider seeking support from your family, trusted colleagues or wider network such as your professional association.

What to expect: Step-by-step overview

Note: Different processes may apply in cases involving transmissible major viral infections (blood borne viruses) or Court-issued drink-driving convictions. If this applies to you, your case manager will explain the specific steps.

1. Initial contact

We will contact you promptly to discuss the notification. You will be assigned a case manager who will guide and support you throughout the process.

2. Providing your comments

You'll have an opportunity, within a specified period, to provide information about your health and how it affects your practice. If you need more time, contact your case manager as soon as possible to discuss your request. Please note that extensions are not automatic and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3. How the Council considers your situation

Council will meet (in person or by teleconference) to consider the notification and your comments.

3.1 Health assessment (if required)

If needed, Council may decide to ask you to undergo an independent health assessment (at our cost) by a Council-appointed health practitioner. You have the right to:

- Be consulted about the choice of assessor
- Have a support person with you at the assessment.

We will notify you of the appointment details.

The assessor's report will be shared with both you and Council. You will have a reasonable opportunity to respond to the report.

Purpose of a health assessment:

To assess whether a health condition exists and its impact on your ability to practise.

3.2 Possible interim measures

Council will carefully consider your individual circumstances, workplace arrangements, and existing support systems. In some cases, temporary measures may be taken while awaiting assessment results:

- Change to your scope of practice or new conditions (e.g., supervision)
- Practising certificate suspension (rare).

These measures may apply for up to 40 working days (20 initially, with a 20-day extension if needed – depending on the time needed to complete and consider the assessment).

4. Final decision by the Council

Council will consider the assessor's report, your submissions, and all relevant information.

- If you do not attend a scheduled assessment, Council may act without it.
- You are given the option to attend a Council meeting or provide a written submission.
- Contact your case manager if you wish to discuss attending.

Summary of the process

We aim to:

- Minimise risk with the least necessary intervention
- Collaborate with you to manage risks
- Help restore your fitness to practise
- Maintain public safety without being punitive

Your case manager will keep you informed of Council decisions as soon as possible after each meeting.

Possible outcomes

- **No action**
- **Conditions on your scope of practice**, such as:

Practice limitations

- Restrictions on procedures or work settings
- Working under supervision

Disclosure and monitoring

- Notify colleagues of restrictions
- Drug/alcohol testing
- Regular reports from treating clinicians

Support and recovery

- Therapy or counselling
- Peer support (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Mentorship
- Return-to-work planning
- Voluntary undertakings

- **Suspension until fit to practise again.**

We're here to help

If you or a colleague are experiencing health difficulties, **please contact us early**. We are committed to protecting patients and helping practitioners continue practising safely.

We will treat you fairly and respectfully throughout the process.

If you have any questions, please contact your case manager.

Contact us

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Dental Council

Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho