



2022 Facts about Missouri Dental Hygienists

Registered Dental Hygienists (RDHs) are licensed oral health professionals who use preventive, educational and therapeutic methods to prevent oral diseases in an effort to achieve oral health. A **state license** and the **RDH designation** assure patients that the person providing preventive oral health care has graduated from an accredited college or university and has completed national and regional board examinations. MDHA strongly opposes any lessening of educational standards or requirements for oral health care providers.

Education: Dental hygienists must be educated in a post-secondary dental hygiene program that is accredited by the American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). The minimum length of most programs is three years due to required prerequisite coursework; however, the average credit hours received for a dental hygiene program is eighty-four (84) hours for an associate degree and one hundred and eighteen (118) hours for a baccalaureate degree.¹ There are baccalaureate and a master's degree program for dental hygienists in Missouri.

Dental hygiene education includes an average of 3016 clock hours with over six hundred (681) clock hours of supervised pre-clinical and clinical dental hygiene instruction.²

In Missouri, there are currently six dental hygiene programs that can **potentially graduate approximately 162 dental hygienists per year**. (There is an annual variation due to some programs having different graduation dates). However, Missouri College in St. Louis closed in September 2016; Rolla and Sikeston distance education sites associated with Missouri Southern State University closed in 2018; and Hillyard Technical College associated with North Central Missouri College in Trenton, MO closed in the Spring of 2020. **Note that the potential number of dental hygiene graduates has doubled in the last ten years but manpower numbers will change with the closing of four of the ten dental hygiene educational sites.**

The current schools include:

- Missouri Southern State University in Joplin-30 students
 - Ozark Technical College in Springfield-20 students
 - University of Missouri-Kansas City in Kansas City-30 students
 - St. Louis Community College at Forest Park-32 students (only accepted 16 for 2022 graduating class with some attrition)
 - State Fair Community College in Sedalia-10 students (every other year it goes to 12 students)
 - Concorde Career College in Kansas City (opened March 2010)-28 students (graduate every 18 months)*
- This number will increase to 32 potential students who graduate in the interim six-month period in an 18-month programs.

Regulation: Missouri dental hygienists are licensed and regulated through the Missouri Dental Board. In addition, there is a five-member Advisory Commission for Dental Hygienists (ACDH) which makes recommendations to the board on dental hygiene education, examination, licensure, practice, and

discipline of dental hygienists. The Missouri Dental Board currently has one (1) hygienist, five (5) dentists and one (1) public member.

Laws: Laws and rules regulating dental hygienists are found in the Missouri Dental Practice Act under Chapter 332.RSMo.

Licensure: After completion of an accredited dental hygiene program, a dental hygiene candidate for licensure must take a written National Dental Hygiene Board Examination, a clinical exam, and a jurisprudence test on Missouri laws in order to obtain a Missouri license. Licensure by credentials is available to dental hygienists who have been actively practicing for two years in another state.

Practice: Dental hygienists perform preventive oral health services such as preliminary clinical exams of teeth and oral tissues, scaling and polishing of the teeth, the identification and treatment of gingivitis and periodontal disease, radiograph (x-ray) exposure, sealant placement, fluoride application, oral health education, and other applicable services. Missouri dental hygienists may give local anesthesia and administer nitrous oxide analgesia and place certain types of fillings with additional education.

Supervision: In Missouri, dental hygienists may work under the general supervision of the dentist in any setting, which means the dentist does not have to be present when the dental hygienist performs clinical services within twelve months of a dentist's exam.

Public Health Settings: Since 2001, laws provide that dental hygienists with three years of experience may perform certain preventive services (cleanings, fluoride, sealants) without a dentist's supervision on medically assisted children in public health settings with reimbursement to the facility by MO HealthNet. Teledentistry is now allowed in Missouri utilizing dental hygienists. This helps give access to care in underserved areas. Teledentistry has also been helpful during COVID-19.

Continuing Education: The Missouri Dental Practice Act requires that dental hygienists receive thirty (30) hours of continuing education every two years along with Basic Life Support certification renewal.

Manpower Issues: As of January 2022, the Missouri Dental Board data indicates there are 3485 dental hygienists, 2641 general dentists and 575 specialists with an active license and a Missouri address.⁴

1. American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) 2012 Dental Hygiene Program Director Survey, 2014, ADHA, (Unofficial)
2. American Dental Association (ADA) 2013-14 Survey of Allied Dental Education, 2015, ADA Survey Center
3. http://www.adha.org/downloads/edu/dh_ed_fact_sheet.pdf
4. <https://pr.mo.gov/listings-den.asp>