



Dental Care for Older Adults

Regulatory Requirements in Long Term Care Settings

When practicing dentistry on-site in a nursing facility, services must be compliant with applicable Medicare and Medicaid rules and regulations, state nursing home rules and regulations, and other rules regulating health care services for vulnerable adults.

The most significant federal regulations are often referred to as “OBRA ‘87” (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1987) and they include rules relating to the provision of dental care. The regulation states that a *skilled nursing facility must directly or under agreements with others provide for the provision of routine and emergency dental services to meet the needs of each resident.*

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/100/hr3545/summary>

(See Subtitle C – Nursing Home Reform)

State regulations may be more detailed and clear. For example in 1992, Minnesota established a regulatory reform task force charged with updating state regulations to assure compliance with the new Federal rules. The resulting regulation provides specific guidance regarding oral health requirements in nursing facilities: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=4658.0720>

Providing Daily Mouth Care – *the primary influence of oral health status, daily mouth care is often a challenge for dependent adults.*

Facilities’ requirements include:

- Establishment of an individualized daily mouth care plan detailing presence of natural teeth and/or dentures or partials which must be made available to the dental professional.



- Assessment of a resident's ability to carry out daily mouth care independently or need for caregiver assistance.
- Requirement to provide daily mouth care supplies and staff assistance.
- Requirement that dentures and partials be labeled with resident's name.

Providing Routine Care – *Availability of routine dental care is important to the oral and overall health of long-term care residents.*

- This standard follows a common legal practice of applying the same standards that apply to similar patients in the community at large.
- Long term care facilities are required to provide or obtain routine dental services. This includes an examination within 90 days of admission.

Providing Emergency Dental Services –

- Long term care facilities are also required to provide or obtain emergency dental services within 24 hours of an episode of acute pain, broken teeth or evidence of other problem in the mouth.

The intent of these regulations is that residents receive needed care to restore and maintain their oral health and avoid the health consequences of untreated mouth diseases. Ideally, oral health program plans will provide all residents with access to a full range of preventive, restorative and emergency services.