



LOWER ELWHA HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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**Frequently Asked Questions
Infection Control Protocol Breach
Lower Elwha Klallam Dental Clinic**

Patient Advocacy Line

Phone: (360)-775-5077

Hours: Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Interpreter services are available.

What happened?

In December 2015 the Lower Elwha Tribe's Dental Clinic identified potential problems with the sterilization and handling of reusable dental equipment. The dental staff found packages of unsterilized reusable dental instruments stocked in patient examination rooms. It is not believed that any of the unsterilized instruments were used on patients.

What is the Risk?

The experts at the Washington State Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control agree the risk of infection from the breach in sterilization protocol is low. However, the only way to know for sure is to be tested. All dental clinic patients seen between November 30 and December 28, 2015, who are interested in testing, will be offered blood borne pathogen testing at no cost to the patients.

Why did this happen?

The Lower Elwha Dental Clinic staff performed processes to clean, disinfect and sterilize instruments and equipment, the techniques and procedures used were not performed in accordance with certain regulatory standards, some manufacturer guidelines, or some were not properly documented. These issues resulted in the unsterilized instruments being stocked in patient rooms. One result of this incident, was an overhaul of the infection control and sterilization processes and protocols for the dental clinic that will protect against future breaches.

Can you tell me whether instruments used during my dental procedure were dirty?

We do not track which reusable instruments are used in a particular patient's procedure, so we cannot be certain that unsterilized instruments were not used in any patient's procedure. But, there are physical safeguards in the packaging (color coding) of reusable dental instruments that make it unlikely that unsterilized instruments were used on any patients. Upon discovering the potentially unsterilized dental instruments through staff identification of the physical safeguards, the instruments were immediately pulled from circulation and sterilized. While the risk of exposure

is low, we recommend that any dental patients seen between November 30 and December 28, 2015, be tested for blood borne pathogens.

How many patients might be at risk?

We are notifying all of the patients seen between November 30 and December 28, 2015, to offer them a free blood test for blood borne pathogens.

What is my next step if I am concerned about exposure?

Contact the Lower Elwha Health Department's Patient Advocacy Line to schedule free testing for blood borne pathogens such as hepatitis C virus, hepatitis B virus, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

Where do I go for testing?

Should a patient wish to be tested, they should call our Patient Advocacy line at (360)-775-5077, and a healthcare provider will answer their questions and coordinate lab testing. Following the test, patients will meet with a healthcare provider to review all the results. Testing and evaluation will be fully paid for by Lower Elwha Health Department.

What blood borne pathogens are included in the testing?

Patients will be tested for hepatitis C virus, hepatitis B virus, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) as these viruses can pose a threat to a patient's health.

What if I have a test that is positive?

Although the risk is low, a positive test is possible. Some people may already be positive for one of these viruses and not know it. The Centers for Disease Control report that about 3 million Americans have hepatitis C, most are baby boomers or people born from 1945-1965. Baby boomers are 5 times more likely to have hepatitis C than other age groups. CDC suggests people born during these years get tested. To learn more about hepatitis C, as well as hepatitis B and HIV, including transmission routes, go to www.cdc.gov and use the keyword search.

We will arrange for anyone with a positive test to be seen by an infectious disease physician. They can perform tests to confirm any positive laboratory test and determine if it is an existing condition or a new infection.

What has the Lower Elwha Health Department done to address this concern and ensure it won't happen again?

As soon as the Lower Elwha Health Department learned of the breach in infection control procedures, we took immediate steps to make sure that all medical equipment was handled and processed correctly. In addition, we worked with the Washington State Department of Health, the Indian Health Services, and an expert in dental sterilization to conduct a thorough investigation to make sure that, going forward, patients and the public were protected. The dental clinic has implemented the recommendations received from these experts.