

# District of Columbia

## Allowable and Prohibited Duties for Dental Assistants

At-a-glance information includes a dental assisting career ladder and job titles, radiography requirements, education and exam requirements, delegable functions and supervision levels, and prohibited functions.

These data are presented for informational purposes only and are not intended as a legal opinion regarding dental practice in any state. DANB confers with each state's dental board annually or when changes occur regarding the accuracy and currency of this information. To verify, or if you have any questions, please contact your state's dental board.



### INSIDE:

- State requirements and functions chart
- Appendix A: information about numbering system
- Appendix B: information about supervision levels for dental assistants



# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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## Job Titles

### District of Columbia Career Ladder

There are three recognized levels of dental assistants in the District of Columbia. See the following pages for details about requirements and allowed functions for each level. Numbers for each level are provided for internal reference and do not correspond to specific state designations.



3 Level 3 Dental Assistant

2 Level 2 Dental Assistant

1 Level 1 Dental Assistant

## Radiography Requirements

### Radiography Requirements

In order to legally operate dental x-ray equipment and perform dental radiographic procedures in the District of Columbia, a dental assistant must:

- a. Pass DANB's Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) exam or DANB's Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) exam **OR**  
b. Successfully complete a dental radiography training program consisting of at least twenty-four (24) hours of coursework in radiology, radiation safety, biology, and physics, and has successfully passed the examination(s) required for successful completion of the program.  
**AND**
2. Register as a Level II or Level III Dental Assistant with the D.C. Board of Dentistry (see additional requirements in "Requirements" sections on the pages that follow)

## Prohibited Duties

### Functions NOT Permitted by Dental Assistants in District of Columbia

*Functions with numbers correspond to functions included in a 2002-2005 study of dental assisting core competencies. See page 11 for more information.*

The following functions shall not be delegated to dental auxiliaries:

2. The charting of cavities during preliminary examination, prophylaxis, or polishing
- 12, 51. Placing, carving, or finishing of amalgam restorations
15. Temporary wire ligation
24. The instruction of individuals or groups of individuals in oral health care, unless it is in the dental office and done as instructed by the dentist
29. Final positioning of orthodontic bonds and bands
33. Condensing, contouring or adjusting any final, fixed or removable prosthodontic appliance or restoration in the mouth
33. Placing and finishing of composite resin/silicate restorations
34. Application of cavity liners and bases
35. Placing initial periodontal dressing
46. Taking final impressions
- 47, 50. Placement of temporary restorations
59. Administering or monitoring nitrous oxide
- 63, 69. Applying and removing a socket dressing
  - The restoration of a tooth
  - Performing final diagnosis and treatment planning
  - Performing surgical or cutting procedures on hard or soft tissue
  - Prescribing or parenterally administering drugs or medications
  - Administering inhalants or inhalation conscious sedation agents
  - Authorizing work orders for any appliance or prosthetic device or restoration to be inserted into a patient's mouth
  - Operating high speed rotary instruments in the mouth
  - Performing pulp capping procedures
  - Orthodontic arch wire activation with the exception of minor adjustments to eliminate pain or discomfort
- Taking impressions for master casts to be used for prosthetic restoration of teeth or oral structures
- Final cementation of crowns, bridges, inlays, onlays, posts and cores, and insertion of final prosthesis
- Placing sutures
- Flushing root canals
- The performing of a diagnostic screening to identify indications of oral abnormalities
- A preliminary dental examination
- A complete prophylaxis, including the removal of any deposits, diseased crevicular tissue, accretion, or stain from the surface of a tooth or a restoration
- Administering or monitoring general anesthetics and conscious sedation
- Administering or monitoring local anesthesia
- Adjusting occlusion of natural teeth, restorations, or appliances
- Registration of jaw relations
- Cementing permanent crowns or restorations
- Applying silver diamine fluoride
- Glucose monitoring
- Whitening or bleaching (internal, laser, or high-intensity light)
- Using a high speed handpiece intraorally
- Oral cancer screenings
- Oral cancer tissue biopsy
- Placement of subgingival medicaments
- Removing intracoronal temporary restorations
- Placement of liquid dam



## 1 Level 1 Dental Assistant

### Requirements

#### Education, Training and Credential Requirements

To be registered as a Level I Dental Assistant in the District of Columbia, one must:

1. Have graduated from high school or hold a general equivalency diploma  
**AND**
2. Provide a copy of a current and valid CPR/BLS/First Aid Certification  
**AND**
3. Apply to the D.C. Board of Dentistry for registration

### Allowable

#### Allowable Functions

*Functions with numbers correspond to functions included in a 2002-2005 study of dental assisting core competencies. See page 11 for more information.*

##### Under Direct Supervision\*

6. Placing retraction cord
13. Removing sutures
18. Applying fluoride (rinse, foam tray, and fluoride varnish)
- 27, 45, 48. Placing or removing materials for the isolation of the dentition, provided that the material is not retained by the dentition
35. Placing periodontal dressings
37. Take and record vital signs
44. Taking impression for study models or diagnostic casts
45. Placing matrices
48. Rinsing and aspirating the oral cavity
48. Retracting the lips, cheek, tongue, and flaps
- 54, 55. Removing temporary restorations without the use of a rotary instrument
56. Applying topical anesthesia
64. Constructing athletic mouth guards and night guards on models
  - Performing intraoral photography
  - Curing by the use of halogen light
  - Checking for loose bands
  - Whitening or bleaching using trays
  - Other functions as approved by the Board

##### Under Direct Supervision\* of an Orthodontist

15. Placing and removing arch wires
29. Preparing and fitting orthodontic bands
  - Removing excess cement from around orthodontic bands
  - Cementing orthodontic bands, placing bonded attachments, or removing cemented or bonded orthodontic bands and attachments
  - Placing elastics and ligatures
  - Selecting headgear

**\*Direct supervision:** The dentist is in the dental office or treatment facility, personally diagnoses the condition to be treated, personally authorizes the procedures, remains in the dental office or treatment facility while the procedures are being performed by the dental assistant, and personally evaluates the performance of the dental assistant before dismissal of the patient.



## 2 Level 2 Dental Assistant

### Requirements

#### Education, Training and Credential Requirements

To be registered as a Level II Dental Assistant in the District of Columbia, one must:

1. Have graduated from high school or hold a general equivalency diploma **AND**
2. Successfully complete a dental assisting education program approved by the D.C. Board of Dentistry or accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) **OR** Hold a current and valid certification as a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) in general duties from the DANB or another dental assisting certification approved by the Board  
**AND**
3. Successfully passed the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) examination **OR** Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) examination **OR** Complete a course in dental radiography training consisting of at least twenty-four (24) hours of coursework in radiology, radiation safety, biology, and physics, and has successfully passed the examination(s) required for successful completion of the program  
**AND**
4. Provide a copy of a current and valid CPR/BLS/First Aid Certification **AND**
5. Apply for registration as a Level II Dental Assistant to the D.C. Board of Dentistry

### Allowable

#### Allowable Functions

*Functions with numbers correspond to functions included in a 2002-2005 study of dental assisting core competencies. See page 11 for more information.*

##### Under Direct Supervision\*

14. Drying a root canal
27. Placing or removing a rubber dam
35. Removing or placing a periodontal dressing (except placing the original periodontal dressing)
43. Preparing and fitting stainless steel crowns
44. Taking alginate impressions for intraoral appliances
45. Placing or removing a matrix band
47. Fabricating indirect restorations in a dental office
47. Preparing temporary crowns
49. Performing vitality tests
- 54, 61. Removing excess cement
55. Removal of temporary restorations without the use of a rotary instrument
  - Applying desensitizing agents;
  - Etching
  - All functions permitted to Level I Dental Assistant

##### Under Direct Supervision\* of an Orthodontist

15. Placing and removing arch wires
29. Preparing and fitting orthodontic bands
  - Removing excess cement from around orthodontic bands
  - Cementing orthodontic bands, placing bonded attachments, or removing cemented or bonded orthodontic bands and attachments
  - Placing elastics and ligatures
  - Selecting headgear

**\*Direct supervision:** The dentist is in the dental office or treatment facility, personally diagnoses the condition to be treated, personally authorizes the procedures, remains in the dental office or treatment facility while the procedures are being performed by the dental assistant, and personally evaluates the performance of the dental assistant before dismissal of the patient.



## 3 Level 3 Dental Assistant

### Education, Training and Credential Requirements

To be registered as a Level III Dental Assistant in the District of Columbia, one must:

1. Have graduated from high school or hold a general equivalency diploma  
**AND**
2. Successfully complete a dental assisting education program approved by the D.C. Board of Dentistry or accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA)  
**AND**
3. Successfully passed the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) examination **OR** complete a course in dental radiography training consisting of at least twenty-four (24) hours of coursework in radiology, radiation safety, biology, and physics, and has successfully passed the examination(s) required for successful completion of the program  
**AND**
4. Hold a current and valid certification as a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) in general duties from the DANB or another dental assisting certification approved by the Board  
**AND**
5. Obtain DANB Certified Preventive Functions Dental Assistant (CPFDA) Certification  
**AND**
6. Pass a Board-approved, hands-on course in the functions and duties permitted to be performed by a Level III Dental Assistant  
**AND**
7. Provide a copy of a current and valid CPR/BLS/First Aid Certification  
**AND**
8. Apply for registration as a Level III Dental Assistant to the D.C. Board of Dentistry

### Allowable Functions

Functions with numbers correspond to functions included in a 2002-2005 study of dental assisting core competencies. See page 11 for more information.

#### Under Direct Supervision\*

9. Coronal polishing to remove stain and biofilm
40. The application of pit and fissure sealants
  - Glucose testing
  - All functions permitted to Level I and Level II Dental Assistants

#### Under Direct Supervision\* of an Orthodontist

15. Placing and removing arch wires
29. Preparing and fitting orthodontic bands
  - Removing excess cement from around orthodontic bands
  - Cementing orthodontic bands, placing bonded attachments, or removing cemented or bonded orthodontic bands and attachments
  - Placing elastics and ligatures
  - Selecting headgear

# Appendix A: Numbering System for Dental Assisting Functions

The following list of 70 dental assisting tasks was developed by the ADAA/DANB Alliance as part of a study of dental assisting core competencies conducted between 2002 and 2005. These selected tasks were determined to be representative of a broad range of dental assisting core competencies.

The numbered functions listed in the preceding state charts correspond to functions that were included in the DANB/ADAA core competencies study and use language directly from the state's dental practice act. The numbers are provided to facilitate comparison between and among states. Functions listed with bullets in the preceding charts are part of the state's practice act but are not specific matches to the functions that were included in the 2002-2005 study.

- |                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Perform mouth mirror inspection of the oral cavity                                                  | 26. Provide pre- and post-operative instructions                                                                                                             | 49. Perform vitality tests                                                                                                                                      |
| 2. Chart existing restorations or conditions                                                           | 27. Place and remove dental dam                                                                                                                              | 50. Place temporary fillings                                                                                                                                    |
| 3. Phone in prescriptions at the direction of the dentist                                              | 28. Pour, trim and evaluate the quality of diagnostic casts                                                                                                  | 51. Carve amalgams                                                                                                                                              |
| 4. Receive and prepare patients for treatment, including seating, positioning chair and placing napkin | 29. Size and place orthodontic bands and brackets                                                                                                            | 52. Process dental radiographs                                                                                                                                  |
| 5. Complete laboratory authorization forms                                                             | 30. Using the concepts of four-handed dentistry, assist with basic restorative procedures, including prosthodontics and restorative dentistry                | 53. Mount and label dental radiographs                                                                                                                          |
| 6. Place and remove retraction cord                                                                    | 31. Identify intraoral anatomy                                                                                                                               | 54. Remove temporary crowns and cements                                                                                                                         |
| 7. Perform routine maintenance of dental equipment                                                     | 32. Demonstrate understanding of the OSHA Hazard Communication Standard                                                                                      | 55. Remove temporary fillings                                                                                                                                   |
| 8. Monitor and respond to post-surgical bleeding                                                       | 33. Place, cure and finish composite resin restorations                                                                                                      | 56. Apply topical anesthetic to the injection site                                                                                                              |
| 9. Perform coronal polishing procedures                                                                | 34. Place liners and bases                                                                                                                                   | 57. Demonstrate understanding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines                                                                      |
| 10. Apply effective communication techniques with a variety of patients                                | 35. Place periodontal dressings                                                                                                                              | 58. Using the concepts of four-handed dentistry, assist with basic intraoral surgical procedures, including extractions, periodontics, endodontics and implants |
| 11. Transfer dental instruments                                                                        | 36. Demonstrate understanding of the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard                                                                                      | 59. Monitor nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia                                                                                                                      |
| 12. Place amalgam for condensation by the dentist                                                      | 37. Take and record vital signs                                                                                                                              | 60. Maintain emergency kit                                                                                                                                      |
| 13. Remove sutures                                                                                     | 38. Monitor vital signs                                                                                                                                      | 61. Remove permanent cement from supragingival surfaces                                                                                                         |
| 14. Dry canals                                                                                         | 39. Clean and polish removable appliances and prostheses                                                                                                     | 62. Remove periodontal dressings                                                                                                                                |
| 15. Tie in arch wires                                                                                  | 40. Apply pit and fissure sealants                                                                                                                           | 63. Place post-extraction dressings                                                                                                                             |
| 16. Demonstrate knowledge of ethics/jurisprudence/patient confidentiality                              | 41. Prepare procedural trays/armamentaria setups                                                                                                             | 64. Fabricate custom trays, to include impression and bleaching trays, and athletic mouthguards                                                                 |
| 17. Identify features of rotary instruments                                                            | 42. Place orthodontic separators                                                                                                                             | 65. Recognize basic medical emergencies                                                                                                                         |
| 18. Apply topical fluoride                                                                             | 43. Size and fit stainless steel crowns                                                                                                                      | 66. Recognize basic dental emergencies                                                                                                                          |
| 19. Select and manipulate gypsums and waxes                                                            | 44. Take preliminary impressions                                                                                                                             | 67. Respond to basic medical emergencies                                                                                                                        |
| 20. Perform supragingival scaling                                                                      | 45. Place and remove matrix bands                                                                                                                            | 68. Respond to basic dental emergencies                                                                                                                         |
| 21. Mix dental materials                                                                               | 46. Take final impressions                                                                                                                                   | 69. Remove post-extraction dressings                                                                                                                            |
| 22. Expose radiographs                                                                                 | 47. Fabricate and place temporary crowns                                                                                                                     | 70. Place stainless steel crown                                                                                                                                 |
| 23. Evaluate radiographs for diagnostic quality                                                        | 48. Maintain field of operation during dental procedures through the use of retraction, suction, irrigation, drying, placing and removing cotton rolls, etc. |                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 24. Provide patient preventive education and oral hygiene instruction                                  |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 25. Perform sterilization and disinfection procedures                                                  |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                 |

## Appendix B: Levels of Supervision

An important consideration in the discussion of the delegation of tasks to dental assistants is that of supervision of dental assistants by their dentist-employers. The American Dental Association (ADA) has identified five levels of supervision for allied dental personnel, including dental assistants, which it defines in its “Comprehensive Policy Statement on Allied Dental Personnel,” (2010: 505) which is part of its *Current Policies*, last updated in 2020. Note that “allied dental personnel” refers to dental assistants, dental hygienists and dental laboratory technicians.

The five levels of supervision defined by the ADA are as follows:

**Personal supervision.** A type of supervision in which the dentist is personally operating on a patient and authorizes the allied dental personnel to aid treatment by concurrently performing a supportive procedure.

**Direct supervision.** A type of supervision in which a dentist is in the dental office or treatment facility, personally diagnoses and treatment plans the condition to be treated, personally authorizes the procedures and remains in the dental office or treatment facility while the procedures are being performed by the allied dental personnel, and evaluates their performance before dismissal of the patient.

**Indirect supervision.** A type of supervision in which a dentist is in the dental office or treatment facility, has personally diagnosed and treatment planned the condition to be treated, authorizes the procedures and remains in the dental office or treatment facility while the procedures are being performed by the allied dental personnel, and will evaluate the performance of the allied dental personnel.

**General supervision.** A type of supervision in which a dentist is not required to be in the dental office or treatment facility when procedures are provided, but has personally diagnosed and treatment planned the condition to be treated, has personally authorized the procedures, and will evaluate the performance of the allied dental personnel.

**Public Health Supervision.** A type of supervision in which a licensed dental hygienist may provide dental hygiene services, as specified by state law or regulations, when such services are provided as part of an organized community program in various public health settings, as designated by state law, and with general oversight of such programs by a licensed dentist designated by the state.

Furthermore, the ADA’s “Comprehensive Policy Statement on Allied Dental Personnel” stipulates that intraoral expanded functions should be performed by allied dental personnel “under the supervision of a dentist.”

Because the study of dental assisting core competencies undertaken by the ADAA/DANB Alliance did not address the question of supervision, the ADAA/DANB Alliance has not made any recommendations as to the levels of supervision that should be necessary for the delegation of the tasks included in the study to dental assistants. However, the ADAA/DANB Alliance believes it is important to call attention to the fact that while the ADA has defined supervision levels in the aforementioned policy statement, which governs the ADA’s own activities and the activities of its members, these definitions have not been uniformly adopted by the dental boards of every U.S. state or district.

***For the purposes of the attached charts, if a state’s dental practice act specifically defines levels of supervision, the state-specific definition is noted in the template.***

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