What is Dental Hygiene?

Dental Hygiene is a career designed for helping patients maintain and improve their dental and oral health. Dental Hygienists clean teeth and teach clients how to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. They discuss general health issues with patients and update dental charts. They inspect patients’ teeth for deposits and decay, and look for any disease in the gums. They take x-rays, use dental instruments to clean teeth, apply sealant and fluoride. Some may be licensed to apply anesthesia.

Dental Hygienists need good interpersonal communications in their continuous contact with patients and team members. They also need excellent manual dexterity.

What can I do with a Degree in Dental Hygiene?

Many Dental Hygienists begin their careers directly after earning a specific Dental Hygiene associate degree and passing all licensing requirements. It is also possible to continue education in Dental Hygiene with a Bachelor degree in Dental Hygiene or a Bachelor of Applied Science in Allied Health, with a Dental Hygiene emphasis.

Related Majors

- Dentist
- Dental Assistant
- Surgical Technologist

Where can I study Dental Hygiene?

Many community colleges in Washington offer Dental Hygiene Associate degrees, including: Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Shoreline Community College, Tacoma Community College, and others. Eastern Washington University offers a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene in Spokane as well as bachelor degree completion opportunities online. Seattle Central College offers a Bachelor of Applied Science in Allied Health, with a Dental Hygiene emphasis.

How do I get started?

We are here to help you get started on your path to becoming a Dental Hygienist! Bellevue College does not have a Dental Hygiene program but students may complete all the prerequisites at BC.

Dental Hygiene programs are academically highly competitive for entry, needing over a 3.0 GPA or higher in prerequisite coursework. They also typically require some form of experience in a dental office.

Step One: Research

Making an informed decision about a major requires active research. Here are steps you should complete while determining whether a degree in Dental Hygiene is the best fit for you:

- Log on to wois.org (using the BC network) or use the national occupations website O*NET (oneline.org) to learn more about all the requirements, skills, abilities, and demands for working as a Dental Hygienist.

- If you wish to pursue a degree in Dental Hygiene after researching the career, please review individual college websites to learn the unique entry requirements for each program. There are usually a number of prerequisites to complete, minimum GPA requirements, and possibly even volunteer or other healthcare experience required before applying.

- Every college and major concentration may require different prerequisite courses to be completed prior to enrolling in a Dental Hygiene program. For more info, contact a departmental representative at your potential college.
Step Two: Pick a BC Degree

As a transfer student, you not only have the responsibility of researching the prerequisite courses required for Dental Hygiene, but you should also consider a BC associates degree that can include all of your Dental Hygiene prerequisites.

Please review the degree you will use with your funding source, especially if using Financial Aid, the GI Bill, or Workforce Education funding, as some restrictions may apply.

Though it is not always required to complete a transfer associates degree to prepare for Dental Hygiene, if your plan is to earn a degree, the one with the most flexibility to meet Dental Hygiene prerequisites is the Associate in Arts & Sciences Direct Transfer Agreement (AAS-DTA) degree.

Step Three: Make a Plan

The table below has a list of typical prerequisite courses for many Washington Dental Hygiene programs. It is possible not all courses are required, depending on the college. Also, courses with an asterisk * may be prerequisite to a BC course, or apply to completing the AAS-DTA degree in order to transfer to a Bachelors degree program in Dental Hygiene. Since schools may require different prerequisites to those listed below we strongly encourage you to research your school of choice.

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<th>Winter</th>
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<td>CHEM&amp; 121 (6)</td>
<td>CHEM&amp; 131 (6)</td>
<td>BIOL&amp; 160 (6)*</td>
<td>Continuing work/volunteer experience</td>
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<td>ENGL 201 (5)*</td>
<td>Elective (5)*</td>
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For most new students, an ideal first quarter schedule should include courses in Math and English, and depending on COMPASS Math placement level, a Chemistry course.

It is also important to research individual programs’ application deadlines. Dental Hygiene programs can vary greatly on when they accept applications, which prerequisites must be done by the application deadline, and when they accept/enroll students into the program. Please research the starting dates and application deadlines carefully as those should be an important factor in considering your academic preparation and when you need to complete your prerequisites.

Now that you have had a chance to review your prerequisites, the degrees offered at BC, and the application deadlines to your program, a great next step is to meet with an adviser.

To schedule an appointment with an advisor, you can stop by the Academic Advising front desk located on the second floor of the Student Services building (the B building) or you can call 425-564-2212 to get connected to an advisor specializing in your interests.

This is an unofficial guide only, designed to prepare students for entry into Washington State Dental Hygiene programs. It is the student’s responsibility to research and communicate with all community college and university programs to which he/she intends to apply to establish prerequisites and admission requirements, as they vary and are subject to change without notice.

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