

Dental Assistant

■ Job Description

A dental assistant performs many duties at chairside, assisting the dentist with patients. The assistant may sterilize and prepare instruments, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and greet and prepare patients. Dental assistants also perform routine clerical tasks, and may answer the telephone, schedule appointments, order supplies, and manage the dental office. Registered dental assistants can take x-rays, polish teeth, apply fluoride, take impressions, remove surgical dressings and sutures, and may perform laboratory procedures. Dental assistants are often involved in instructing patients in proper dental care and nutrition.

■ Job Settings

Private and specialty dental practices, clinics, government institutions, public health agencies, and educational institutions. Almost two out of five work part-time, sometimes in more than one dentist's office.

■ Projected Need

Nationally, employment of dental assistants is expected to increase much faster than average through 2010. In Illinois, dental assistants is one of the 50 fastest growing occupations. About 590 job openings are expected each year in the state. While the need for dentists may decline, the need for assistants is expected to increase, as they continue to perform routine procedures and tasks. Job prospects should be good. Besides growth in the occupation, many more job openings will arise from the need to replace dental assistants who leave the field. In Illinois, there were about 12,000 people employed in this medium-sized occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for dental assistants is \$12.85 per hour. Half of all dental assistants earn between \$10.23 and \$16.28 per hour.

In Illinois, the median wage is \$9.17 per hour. Wages in selected cities are given below:

City	Median Hourly Wage
Bloomington-Normal	\$12.18
Champaign-Urbana	\$15.63

Decatur	\$10.78
Moline-Rock Island	\$12.76
Peoria-Pekin	\$11.04
Rockford	\$10.71
Springfield	\$12.86
St. Louis	\$12.23

■ Related Careers

Dental hygienist, dental laboratory technician, dentist, medical assistant

■ Differences in Training

Most of the following ADA-approved programs are certificate programs that may be completed in nine months to a year. Most programs have no prerequisites, may be entered at the beginning of any semester, and may be taken part-time or during the evening.

Elgin Community College - Elgin
Illinois Valley Community College - Oglesby
John A. Logan College - Carterville
Kaskaskia College - Centralia
Lewis and Clark Community College - Godfrey

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/login.asp>

[Dental Assisting](#)

■ Credentials

Certification may be obtained by attending an accredited dental assisting program and taking the Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) exam. Certification may also be gained by having two years or more of work experience and taking the exam. More information is available from the Dental Assisting National Board. Not all dental assistants are certified.

■ Resources

American Dental Assistants Association
35 East Wacker Drive, Suite 1730
Chicago, IL 60601-2211
Phone: 312.541.1550

<http://www.dentalassistant.org>

Ten scholarships are available in the amount of \$500 each to dental assisting students. An applicant must be a regular member or a student member of the association.

Dental Assisting National Board
676 N. St. Clair, Suite 1880
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: 800.367.3262
<http://www.danb.org>

American Dental Association
Commission on Dental Accreditation
211 E. Chicago Avenue
Phone: 312.440.2500
E-mail: mediarelations@ada.org
Chicago, IL 60611
<http://www.ada.org>
Select "Teachers & Students." Click on "Career Resources" in the left side bar.

The ADA Foundation offers up to ten \$1,000 scholarships to students in an accredited dental assisting program.