

Dental Hygienist

■ Job Description

A dental hygienist is a licensed preventative oral health professional who provides educational, clinical, and therapeutic services. These include evaluation of patient health, tissues of the head and neck, and intraoral soft and hard tissues; removal of calculus, stain, and plaque; application of cavity-preventive agents such as fluoride and pit and fissure sealants; development of individualized oral hygiene programs; dietary analysis and counseling; exposure, processing, and interpretation of dental x-rays; education of patients and the public about the importance of good oral hygiene; and development and promotion of community dental health programs. In some states, hygienists administer local anesthetics and anesthetic gas; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; and smooth and polish metal restorations.

■ Job Setting

Private dental offices, schools, hospitals, health departments, nursing homes, dental hygiene education programs, business and industry, and research facilities

■ Projected Need

Nationally, employment of dental hygienists is expected to increase much faster than average through 2010. In Illinois, dental hygienist is one of the 50 fastest growing occupations in the state. About 340 job openings are expected in Illinois each year. Much of the demand for dental hygienists results from dentists hiring them to do tasks that dentists once did. As the population ages, demand for dental services will increase. Job prospects should be good. Besides growth in the occupation, many more job openings will arise from the need to replace dental hygienists who leave the field.

In Illinois, there were 7,390 people employed in this medium-sized occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Salaries of dental hygienists depend on the hours they work and their responsibilities. Their level of education and the area of the country where they work also affect their wages. Hygienists may be paid by the client, day, or by the hour. Many hygienists work part time and some are paid a combination of salary and commission.

Nationally, the median wage for dental hygienists is \$26.30 per hour. Half of all hygienists earn between \$21.81 and \$32.25 per hour.

In Illinois, the median wage for dental hygienists is \$25.67 per hour. Wages in selected cities are given below:

City	Median Hourly Wage
Bloomington-Normal	\$13.64
Champaign-Urbana	\$20.13
Chicago	\$29.50
Decatur	\$20.65
Kankakee	\$24.52

City	Median Hourly Wage
Moline-Rock Island	\$20.48
Peoria-Pekin	\$13.75
Rockford	\$27.17
Springfield	\$20.19
St. Louis	\$26.62

■ Related Careers

Dentist, dental assistant, and dental laboratory technologist

■ Differences in Training

There were approximately 265 accredited dental hygiene education programs in the United States in 2003. Accredited dental hygiene programs are a minimum of two years in length, with about half of the programs preferring applicants who have completed one year of college. Positions in education, research, and public health usually require a bachelor's or master's degree. In Illinois, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale offers the only Bachelor of Science degree in Dental Hygiene; all of the others are AAS programs.

The following community colleges in Illinois offer accredited dental hygiene programs:

Carl Sandburg College - Galesburg
College of DuPage - Glenn Ellyn
College of Lake County - Grayslake
Harper College - Palatine
Illinois Central College - East Peoria
John A. Logan College - Carterville
Kennedy-King College - Chicago

Lake Land College - Mattoon
Lewis and Clark Community College - Godfrey
Parkland College - Champaign
Prairie State College - Chicago Heights
Rock Valley College - Rockford

■ **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 Hygiene](#)

■ **Credentials**

Dental hygienists must be licensed by the state in which they intend to practice. Licensure requirements include graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program and successful completion of both written and clinical exams.

■ **Advanced Training**

A master's degree in dental hygiene is available. Dental hygienists with a master's degree may be employed as faculty or administrators of dental hygiene educational programs, public health administrators, and researchers.

■ **Resources**

American Dental Hygienists' Association
Division of Professional Development
444 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: 312.440.8900
E-mail: mail@adha.net
<http://www.adha.org>
Click on "Education & Careers" in the left side bar.

A number of scholarships of varying amounts up to \$2,000 are available to dental hygiene students. Applicants must have completed at least one year in an accredited dental hygiene program and be able to demonstrate financial need. Also, two scholarships of up to \$2,000 are available to minority dental hygiene students.