

## Questions and Answers re Somaey Dental Services

- **What has caused this issue?**

Following a complaint about infection control to the Dental Council of NSW, public health and Dental Council investigations commenced that included an audit of infection control protocols within the dental clinic. The audit showed that there were some problems with the cleaning, sterilisation and storage of instruments in that this wasn't being done in accordance with guidelines set by the Dental Board of Australia.

Previous records from an infection control audit on 12 August 2016 showed adequate infection control prior to that time.

An expert committee has examined the audit report and other findings of the investigations and concluded that, for patients treated by Dr Somaey after 12 August 2016, there is a risk that a blood borne virus infection (hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV) may have spread from one patient to another from the use of these instruments in procedures where the instruments are in contact with gums with open wounds. This risk applies only to people who had an "invasive" procedure, where dental instruments go into the gums. The risk of any person being infected was assessed as low.

There is also a risk to patients who had an invasive procedure performed by Dr Hamdy El-Saedy who saw patients using Dr Somaey's instruments at Somaey Dental Services in June 2017.

Procedures where a risk may have occurred are called invasive procedures and include oral surgery, such as implant or removal of teeth, or procedures involving work on the gums or diseased or injured teeth.

Patients with only non-invasive procedures such as simple examination, x-rays, denture fittings and placement of crowns are not considered to be at risk.

- **How was it identified?**

The public health investigations were undertaken following referrals from the Dental Council. The Council had received a complaint, which include allegations of poor infection control, made about Dr Somaey. The Council inspected the practice and identified serious infection control issues. These investigations included an audit of infection control protocols and procedures within the clinic and then discussion with an expert panel.

- **What is being done to prevent this happening again?**

The NSW Dental Council suspended the registration of Dr Somaey on 22 June 2017. Dr Somaey did not see any patients at the Fairfield practice after 20 July 2017.

- **What are the diseases I could have been exposed to?**

Poor dental infection control practices could cause an infection from bacteria, viruses or other organisms in the mouth.

There is also a low risk that a patient who had an invasive procedure at Somaey Dental Services since 12 August 2016 may have been exposed to a blood borne virus potentially passed on via a dental instrument from another patient who was already infected. The viruses of concern are hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and HIV.

- **How will I know if I have these diseases?**

Bacterial infections would generally cause infection in the mouth and become evident with pain and/or swelling within a few days to a week after the visit to the dentist. No special test is required for these infections if you have no symptoms.

Blood borne viruses may not cause symptoms at the time of infection or for years afterwards. However infections with these viruses can easily be detected by a blood test.

- **What are the chances I will have one of these diseases?**

For a person who had an invasive procedure, where dental instruments go into the gums, done at Somaey Dental Services after 12 August 2016, the risk of getting a blood borne virus from the

procedure is **low**. The risk may be higher if a person had multiple invasive procedures done by Dr Somaey at the clinic after 12 August 2016.

People who have not had an invasive procedure that involves instruments going into the gums (e.g. simple examination and clean) are not at risk of having caught a blood borne virus infection at Somaey Dental Services.

- **What should I do if I think I have had an invasive procedure?**

We recommend that people who have had at least one invasive procedure are tested for blood borne virus infections. Unfortunately, there are no records available for most patients who had procedures done at Somaey Dental Services.

As a precaution, NSW Health is therefore recommending that all of patients who received treatment at Somaey Dental Services after 12 August 2016 and think that they may have had an invasive procedure should see their doctor to discuss whether they need testing for blood borne viruses (hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV).

There are records for a small number of people who were treated by Dr Somaey since 12 August 2016 whose treatment was funded by a South Western Sydney Local Health District Oral Health Fee For Service "hospital voucher". NSW Health has written to these people individually to advise them whether they need testing for blood borne viruses.

- **How do I know if I have had an invasive procedure?**

Invasive procedures include oral surgery, such as implant or removal of teeth, or procedures involving work on the gums or diseased or injured teeth.

- **I already have one of these diseases – who can I talk to about this?**

Talk to your doctor about monitoring and management of your disease.

- **I wish to make a complaint – who can I talk to?**

Complaints should be made to either:

- NSW Health Care Complaints Commission, on 1800 043 159. Information on how to make a complaint is also available from following the link on their website: <http://www.hccc.nsw.gov.au>
- The Dental Council, on 1300 197 177 or [mail@dentalcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@dentalcouncil.nsw.gov.au).

Phone lines for both the Health Care Complaints Commission and the Dental Council operate from 9am to 5pm on weekdays, where advice can be provided on how to make a complaint.

- **What tests do I need to have?**

Your doctor can organise blood tests for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV infection.

- **How soon will I know the results of the tests?**

Your doctor will advise you on when the results of the tests will be available. It is likely that results will be available in less than 7-10 days.

- **Will I have to pay for seeing my doctor and having these blood tests?**

You should use your usual arrangements to see your doctor visit and get the blood tests – usual Medicare or private health care rebates apply.

- **I went to this dentist before 12 August 2016 – am I at risk?**

There is evidence that infection control procedures at Somaey Dental Services prior to 12 August 2016 were appropriate.

- **What should I do if I have a positive test result?**

You should talk to your doctor about your results.

- **What does it mean if I have a positive test result?**

A positive result means that you have been infected with a blood borne virus sometime in the past. For hepatitis B and hepatitis C, you may have cleared the virus by yourself, or you may have a long term (chronic) infection. Your doctor will tell you whether or not your infection is active now. HIV infection is a lifelong infection.

There are many ways in which people can get infected with HIV and hepatitis B and C viruses. If you have long term infection with one of these viruses, your doctor will work with the local Public Health Unit to investigate possible sources of your infection.

More information on infection with blood borne viruses is available from:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/default.aspx>

- **Is there any evidence that patients have been infected as a result of these problems with infection control?**

The initial investigation did not identify any patients with infections linked to this dental practice.

- **Where can I find further information?**

See the NSW Health website at:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/> and

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/default.aspx>

Call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055.

- **Why wasn't this picked up earlier? How do I know if other dentists are safe?**

All dental practitioners are required to comply with the Dental Board of Australia's '*Guidelines on infection control*'. These guidelines address how dental practitioners must practise in a way that maintains and enhances public health and safety by ensuring that the risk of the spread of infectious diseases is prevented or minimised. Additionally, on renewal of registration as a dental practitioner each year a declaration must be made of compliance with the National Board Guidelines.

In the event that the Dental Council receives a complaint raising concerns about a dental practitioner's infection control procedure, the Dental Council may authorise an inspection of the dental practice in order to assess compliance with the Dental Board of Australia's Guidelines.

Regulation of dentists in New South Wales is the responsibility of the Dental Council of New South Wales. The Dental Council can be contacted on 1300 197 177 or [mail@dentalcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@dentalcouncil.nsw.gov.au).