

Antibiotic Prophylaxis for Dental Patients at Risk for Infection

Latest Revision

2026

Abbreviations

AHA: American Heart Association.

AP: Antibiotic prophylaxis.

IE: Infective endocarditis.

Majr: Medical subject headings major topic.

Tiab: Title and abstract.

VGS: Viridans group streptococcal.

* Used in the PubMed search to identify all terms that begin with this truncated base.

Abstract

This best practice offers recommendations regarding antibiotic prophylaxis to minimize or eliminate transient bacteremia in at-risk dental patients undergoing invasive dental procedures. Evidence supporting the efficacy and use of antibiotic prophylaxis is limited among children. Considering the potential to contribute to antibiotic-resistant microorganisms and possible risk of adverse events, prudence is needed when determining whether prophylaxis is necessary. Antibiotic prophylaxis is warranted for some patients with cardiac conditions and compromised immunity when undergoing dental procedures that involve the manipulation of gingival tissue or the periapical region of teeth or perforation of oral mucosa. While recommendations for certain conditions are discussed within the document, consultation with the patient's physician is recommended for management of other patients potentially at risk due to immune compromise, indwelling vascular catheters or shunts, or implanted devices. Dentists should be familiar with current evidence-based antibiotic prophylaxis recommendations, and specific antibiotic regimens aimed at the microorganisms mainly implicated in infective endocarditis are included.

This document was developed through a collaborative effort of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Councils on Clinical Affairs and Scientific Affairs to offer updated information and guidance on antibiotic prophylaxis for dental patients at risk for infection.

KEYWORDS: ANTIBIOTICS; ANTIBIOTIC PROPHYLAXIS; ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE; ENDOCARDITIS; PREMEDICATIONS

Purpose

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recognizes that numerous medical conditions predispose patients to bacteremia-induced infections. Prophylactic antibiotics are recommended when patients with a high risk of adverse outcomes from bacteremia and infection undergo invasive oral/ dental procedures. These recommendations are intended to help practitioners make decisions regarding antibiotic prophylaxis for dental patients at risk.

Methods

Recommendations on antibiotic prophylaxis for dental patients at risk for infection were developed by the Clinical Affairs Committee, adopted in 1990,¹ and last revised by the Council of Clinical Affairs in 2022.² This revision is based on a review of *Prevention of Infective Endocarditis: Guidelines from the American Heart Association*³, *Infective Endocarditis in Childhood: 2015 Update: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association*⁴, the American Dental Association's report *The Use of Prophylactic Antibiotics*

*Prior to Dental Procedures in Patients with Prosthetic Joints*⁵, and the 2021 guideline on *Prevention of Viridans Group Streptococcal Infective Endocarditis: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association*⁶. It also included PubMed/MEDLINE database searches using key terms: (evidence based dentistry [Majr] OR pediatric dentistry [Majr] OR dental care for children [Majr] OR paediatric dentistry [Tiab] OR dental health services [Majr] OR dentistry [Majr] OR public health dentistry [Majr] OR community dentistry [Majr] OR oral health [Majr]) AND (infective endocarditis [Tiab] OR IE [Tiab] OR bacteremia [Tiab] antibiotic prophylaxis [Tiab] AP [Tiab] OR dental infection* [Tiab] OR dental infection* [Tiab] OR odontogenic infection* [Tiab]); filters: in the last 10 year, English. Ninety-four articles were identified, and 66 articles were deemed not relevant. The remaining 28 were reviewed by abstract; 13 met the search criteria. When data did not appear sufficient or were inconclusive, recommendations were based upon expert and/or consensus opinion by experienced researchers and clinicians.

Background

Bacteremia (bacteria in the bloodstream) is anticipated following invasive dental procedures and can lead to complications in an immunodeficient patient.^{7,8} High-risk cardiac disease, immunosuppression, and immunodeficiencies may compromise one's ability to fight simple infection. The rationale for antibiotic prophylaxis is to reduce or eliminate transient bacteremia caused by invasive dental procedures.^{9,10}

Antibiotic usage may result in the development of resistant organisms.¹¹ Utilization of antibiotic prophylaxis for patients at risk does not provide absolute prevention of infection. Postprocedural symptoms of acute infection (eg, fever, malaise, weakness, lethargy) may indicate antibiotic failure and need for further medical evaluation.

The decision to use antibiotic prophylaxis should be made on an individual basis. Some medical conditions that may predispose patients to postprocedural infections¹² are discussed below. This list is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, the categorization should help practitioners identify children who may be at increased risk. If a patient reports a syndrome or medical condition with which the practitioner is not familiar, it is appropriate to discuss the risk and susceptibility to bacteremia-induced infections with the child's physician prior to any invasive dental procedures.

To date, randomized controlled clinical trials supporting the efficacy and use of antibiotic prophylaxis are limited, especially in the pediatric population. Many recommendations are based on expert consensus.^{4,6,10,13-16} A study found 80% of preprocedural antibiotic prescriptions unnecessary as risk factors were not present, highlighting a concern regarding the appropriateness of prescribed prophylaxis.¹⁷ Conservative use of antibiotics helps minimize the risk of developing resistance to current antibiotic regimens.^{3,18-20} Given the increasing number of organisms that have developed resistance to antibiotic regimens, as well as the potential for an adverse anaphylactic reaction to the drug administered²¹, antibiotic/antimicrobial stewardship and the judicious use of antibiotics for the prevention of IE or other distant-site infections are critical for safe and effective care.^{6,11,17,19} While use of antibiotic prophylaxis is indicated for certain patients undergoing invasive dental procedures, the prevention of oral disease by maintenance of good home care habits and regular dental care is considered more important.^{6,22-24} This may prevent the frequent need for the use of antibiotic therapy and, thus, decrease the risks of resistance and adverse events related to use of antibiotics.^{8,15,22}

Recommendations

Antibiotic prophylaxis for patients at the highest risk of adverse outcomes from bacteremia-induced infections is recommended with certain dental procedures^{3,4,6,7,9,15,25} and should be directed against the most likely infecting organism. Antibiotic stewardship and judicious use are integral to preventing adverse reactions and resistance. Table 1 shows the recommended antibiotic regimen for at-risk patients undergoing invasive procedures, with amoxicillin as the first choice.^{6,10} The American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines have removed the use of clindamycin due to frequent and significant adverse drug reactions from *Clostridium difficile* infections.^{6,21} For patients allergic to penicillin or amoxicillin, cephalexin (or another first generation cephalosporin), azithromycin, or clarithromycin may be used.⁶ Doxycycline is

recommended as an alternative for patients unable to tolerate a penicillin, cephalosporin, or macrolide (Table 1).⁶ Short-term use (<21 days) of doxycycline had not been associated with tooth discoloration in children under 8 years of age.^{26p976-28} Additional antibiotics not included in the AHA guidelines but shown to be effective include moxifloxacin and intravenous amoxicillin-clavulanic acid.¹⁰ Antibiotic prophylaxis should be given 30-60 minutes prior to the procedure; however, it can be given up to 2 hours after if inadvertently not administered prior to the procedure.⁶ A different class of antibiotics is indicated if the patient is already on oral antibiotic therapy or has an allergy or anaphylactic reaction.⁶ If unsure of a reported history of an allergic reaction, consultation with an allergy specialist and skin testing can help determine severity of allergic reactions and course of antibiotic regimen.⁶ If the patient is receiving parenteral antimicrobial therapy for IE or other infections, the same antibiotic can be continued for the dental procedure.⁶ If possible, elective procedures should be delayed 10 days after completion of a short course of antibiotic therapy.⁶ When procedures involve infected tissues or are performed on a patient with a compromised host response, additional doses or a prescribed pre- and postoperative course of antibiotics may be necessary.

Patients with cardiac conditions

The AHA has published guidelines for the prevention of infective endocarditis (IE) and reducing the risk of producing resistant strains of bacteria.^{3,6} IE is an example of an uncommon but life-threatening complication resulting from bacteremia. The incidence of pediatric admissions due to IE was between 0.05 and 0.12 cases per 1000 admissions in a multicenter study of US children's hospitals from 2003-2010.⁴ Although there is no high-quality data showing mortality from or frequency of viridans group streptococcal (VGS) infective endocarditis in children, there also has been no convincing evidence of an increase in these cases among high-risk patients since the publication of the 2007 AHA guidelines.^{6,10,29}

Only a limited number of bacterial species have been implicated in resultant postoperative infections; viridans group streptococci, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Enterococcus* species are the main microorganisms implicated in IE.^{3,4} Enterococcal and other organisms such as *Haemophilus* species, *Aggregatibacter* species, *Cardiobacterium hominis*, *Eikenella corrodens*, and *Kingella* species are less common.⁴ When compared to dental procedures, routine daily activities such as toothbrushing, flossing, and chewing contribute more to the incidence of bacteremia.⁴ Thus, focus for preventing IE has shifted from antibiotic prophylaxis to an emphasis on oral hygiene and the prevention of oral diseases with regular dental care.^{4,6,9,13,15,22,23,25}

A summary of key findings and suggestions by the AHA 2021 scientific statement writing group is outlined in Table 2.

The AHA guidelines recommend antibiotic prophylaxis prior to dental procedures that involve manipulation of gingival tissue or the periapical region of teeth or perforate the oral mucosa (Table 3) for patients with the highest risk of adverse outcomes from VGS IE (Table 4).^{6,18} Comorbidities such as obesity, diabetes, cardiopulmonary disease, vascular disease, hemodialysis, lack of access to tertiary hospitals, or immunosuppression affect the morbidity and mortality of patients with IE.^{7,18} Global consensus with regards to the benefit of antibiotic prophylaxis for prevention of IE is lacking.^{6,9,15,25,29}

At-risk patients with poor oral hygiene and gingival bleeding after routine activities (eg, toothbrushing) have shown an increased incidence of bacteremia as a measure for risk of IE.³ These patients and their parents need to be educated and motivated to maintain personal oral hygiene, including flossing and regular professional preventive dental care, and to be discouraged from getting tattoos or piercings.^{3,6,13,15,22,25} Professional prevention strategies should be based upon the individual's assessed risk for caries and periodontal disease.³⁰

In addition to those diagnoses listed in the AHA guidelines, patients with a reported history of injection drug use¹⁸ as well as patients with rheumatic heart disease with residual disease (eg, moderate/severe regurgitation or stenosis)^{31,32} may be considered at risk for developing IE. Consultation with the patient's physician may be necessary to determine susceptibility to bacteremia-induced infections.

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Specific antibiotic regimens can be found in Table 1. Practitioners and patients/parents can review the entire AHA guidelines⁶ for additional background information as well as discussion of special circumstances (eg, patients already receiving antibiotic therapy, patients on anticoagulant therapy).

Table 1. ANTIBIOTIC REGIMENS FOR A DENTAL PROCEDURE REGIMEN: SINGLE DOSE 30 TO 60 MINUTES BEFORE PROCEDURE			
Situation	Agent	Adults	Children
Oral	Amoxicillin	2 g	50 mg/kg
Unable to take oral medication	Ampicillin OR Cefazolin or ceftriaxone	2 g IM or IV 1 g IM or IV	50 mg/kg IM or IV 50 mg/kg IM or IV
Allergic to penicillin or ampicillin — oral	Cephalexin*† OR Azithromycin or clarithromycin OR Doxycycline	2 g 500 mg 100 mg	50 mg/kg 15 mg/kg <45 kg, 2.2 mg/kg >45 kg, 100 mg
Allergic to penicillin or ampicillin and unable to take oral medication	Cefazolin or ceftriaxone†	1 g IM or IV	50 mg/kg IM or IV

Clindamycin is no longer recommended for antibiotic prophylaxis for a dental procedure.

IM indicates intramuscular; and IV, intravenous.

* Or other first- or second-generation oral cephalosporin in equivalent adult or pediatric dosing.

† Cephalosporins should not be used in an individual with a history of anaphylaxis, angioedema, or urticaria with penicillin or ampicillin

Table 2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS
Key findings
VGS IE is much more likely to develop as a result of transient VGS bacteremia attributable to routine daily activities such as chewing food and toothbrushing than from a dental procedure.
An exceedingly small number of cases of VGS IE could be prevented by AP for a dental procedure, even if prophylaxis is 100% effective.
If AP for a dental procedure is effective in preventing a very small number of cases of VGS IE, it should be suggested only for those patients with the highest risk of adverse outcome from VGS IE.
There is no convincing evidence of an increased frequency of or morbidity or mortality from VGS IE in patients at low, moderate, or high risk of adverse outcome since publication of the 2007 document.
AP for a dental procedure is not suggested solely on the basis of an increased lifetime risk of acquisition of VGS IE
Suggestions
AP for a dental procedure that involves manipulation of gingival tissues, periapical region of teeth, or perforation of the oral mucosa is suggested only for patients with the highest risk of adverse outcome from VGS IE.
Maintenance of good oral health and regular access to dental care are considered more important to prevent VGS IE than AP for a dental procedure. We suggest that patients have biannual dental examinations when such care is available.
Shared decision making is important between patients and health care providers. There may be instances when a health care provider and a patient disagree with the suggestions in the 2021 scientific statement. In these cases, the health care provider should be familiar with and understand the 2021 suggestions to adequately inform patients of the risks and benefits of AP for a dental procedure so that an informed decision may be made.

AP indicates antibiotic prophylaxis; IE=infective endocarditis; VGS=viridans group streptococcal.

Table 3. DENTAL PROCEDURES AND AP	
AP suggested	All dental procedures that involve manipulation of gingival tissue or the periapical region of teeth or perforation of the oral mucosa.
AP not suggested	Anesthetic injections through noninfected tissue, taking dental radiographs, placement of removable prosthodontic or orthodontic appliances, adjustment of orthodontic appliances, placement of orthodontic brackets, shedding of primary teeth, and bleeding from trauma to the lips or oral mucosa.

The antibiotic regimens suggested for prophylaxis for a dental procedure in patients at a high risk of adverse outcome from viridans group streptococcal infective endocarditis are shown in Table 1.

AP indicates antibiotic prophylaxis.

Table 4. AP FOR A DENTAL PROCEDURE: UNDERLYING CONDITIONS FOR WHICH AP IS SUGGESTED	
Prosthetic cardiac valve or material	
	Presence of cardiac prosthetic valve
	Transcatheter implantation of prosthetic valves
	Cardiac valve repair with devices, including annuloplasty, rings, or clips
	Left ventricular assist devices or implantable heart
Previous, relapse, or recurrent IE	
CHD	
	Unrepaired cyanotic CHD, including palliative shunts and conduits
	Completely repaired congenital heart defect with prosthetic material or device, whether placed by surgery or by transcatheter during the first six months after the procedure
	Repaired CHD with residual defects at the site of or adjacent to the site of a prosthetic patch or prosthetic device
	Surgical or transcatheter pulmonary artery valve or conduit placement such as Melody valve and Contegra conduit
Cardiac transplantation recipients who develop cardiac valvulopathy	
AP for a dental procedure not suggested	
	Implantable electronic devices such as a pacemaker or similar devices
	Septal defect closure devices when complete closure is achieved
	Peripheral vascular grafts and patches, including those used for hemodialysis
	Coronary artery stents or other vascular stents
	CNS ventriculoatrial shunts
	Vena cava filters
	Pledgets

AP indicates antibiotic prophylaxis; CHD=congenital heart disease; CNS=central nervous system; and IE=infective endocarditis.

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Circulation. 2021;143(20):e963-e978. Erratum in: *Circulation*. 2021;144(9):e192.
["https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000969"](https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000969)

Patients with shunts, indwelling vascular catheters, or medical devices

The AHA found no evidence linking microorganisms from dental procedures to infections of cardiovascular implantable electronic devices (CIED) and nonvalvular devices.^{6,33,34} The infections occurring after device implantation most often are due to gram positive bacteria with 70% caused by staphylococci or other pathogens such as enterococci, streptococci, and *Cutibacterium* species.³⁵ The AHA does not recommend antibiotic prophylaxis for prosthetic cardiovascular devices such as cardiovascular implantable electronic devices, septal defect closure devices, peripheral vascular grafts and patches, central nervous system ventriculoatrial shunts, vena cava filters and pledgets. (Table 4) Consultation with the child's physician is recommended for management of patients with nonvalvular devices.

Ventriculoatrial (VA), ventriculocardiac (VC), or ventriculovenous (VV) shunts for hydrocephalus were once considered at risk of bacteremia-induced infections due to their vascular access, while ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunts were not.^{33,34} Antibiotic prophylaxis is no longer recommended for patients with ventriculoatrial and ventriculoperitoneal shunts.^{6,33} If concerned, consultation with the child's physician is recommended for management of patients with vascular shunts.

Patients with compromised immunity

Patients with a compromised immune system may be at risk for bacteremia and distant site infections following invasive dental procedures. Existing evidence does not support widespread use of antibiotic prophylaxis, which is reserved for immunocompromised patients and those at high risk for adverse outcomes.²² Consultation with the patient's physician is recommended for management. High-risk patients for whom prophylaxis may be considered includes, but is not limited to, those with^{6,13,14,24,34}

- immunosuppression.^{24,36}
 - neutropenia²⁴
 - cancer chemotherapy, immunosuppressive therapy, and/or radiation therapy³⁶ with neutropenia (absolute neutrophil count [ANC] $<1000/\text{mm}^3$)^{37,38}
 - hematopoietic stem cell or solid organ transplantation
 - human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) with polymorphonuclear leukocyte count (PMNL) $<500/\text{mm}^3$ ^{24,39}
 - severe combined immunodeficiency (SCIDS), neutrophil disorders (eg, severe congenital neutropenia, leukocyte adhesion deficiency, Chédiak-Higashi syndrome, chronic granulomatous disease), complement deficiencies, or any primary immunodeficiency with recurrent infections despite daily antibiotic prophylaxis²⁴
- autoimmune disease (eg, juvenile arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus).
- functional (eg, sickle cell disease) or anatomic asplenia (eg, status post splenectomy).⁴⁰
- chronic high-dose steroid usage.
- uncontrolled diabetes mellitus.
- medication-related osteonecrosis of the jaw (MRONJ).^{41,42}
- hemodialysis.

Patients with head and neck radiation

Antibiotic prophylaxis has been suggested to reduce the risk of osteoradionecrosis of the jaw.³⁸ Although antibiotics can reduce infection in irradiated tissues, evidence for use of antibiotics to reduce risk of osteoradionecrosis in the absence of infection is weak.⁴³

Patients with prosthetic joints

Given the lack of evidence and recognizing the increase in antibiotic resistance and adverse drug reactions, antibiotic prophylaxis prior to dental procedures is no longer recommended for patients with a history of total joint arthroplasty or prosthetic joint infections.^{5,17,44,45} (Table 5) If unsure of medical history or risk, consultation with the child's physician is recommended for invasive dental management.^{5,17,34,45,46}

Table 5. MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS WITH PROSTHETIC JOINTS UNDERGOING DENTAL PROCEDURES 5

Clinical Recommendation:

In general, for patients with prosthetic joint implants, prophylactic antibiotics are *not* recommended prior to dental procedures to prevent prosthetic joint infection.

For patients with a history of complications associated with their joint replacement surgery who are undergoing dental procedures that include gingival manipulation or mucosal incision, prophylactic antibiotics should only be considered after consultation with the patient and orthopedic surgeon.* To assess a patient's medical status, a complete health history is always recommended when making final decisions regarding the need for antibiotic prophylaxis.

Clinical Reasoning for the Recommendation:

- There is evidence that dental procedures are not associated with prosthetic joint implant infections.
- There is evidence that antibiotics provided before oral care do not prevent prosthetic joint implant infections.
- There are potential harms of antibiotics including risk for anaphylaxis, antibiotic resistance, and opportunistic infections like *Clostridium difficile*.
- The benefits of antibiotic prophylaxis may not exceed the harms for most patients.
- The individual patient's circumstances and preferences should be considered when deciding whether to prescribe prophylactic antibiotics prior to dental procedures.

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* In cases where antibiotics are deemed necessary, it is most appropriate that the orthopedic surgeon recommend the appropriate antibiotic regimen and when reasonable write the prescription.
Sollecito T, Abt E, Lockhart P, et al. The use of prophylactic antibiotics prior to dental procedures in patients with prosthetic joints: Evidence-based clinical practice guideline for dental practitioners — a report of the American Dental Association Council on Scientific Affairs. *JADA*. 2015;146(1):11-16.

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***J Am Dent Assoc.* 2015;146(1):11-16.e8.**

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