

What Is an NPI Number and Why Should You Get One?

Information for Dental Hygienists in School-Based Sealant Programs

What Is an NPI Number?

A National Provider Identifier (NPI) is a unique 10-digit identification number, assigned at no cost to health care professionals in the U.S. by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) through the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES). Having an NPI is the first step for a health care professional to contract with their state Medicaid agency. Once contracted, they may submit for reimbursement of health care services they provided to Medicaid/Medicare enrollees. According to the [NPPES website](#), *"The purpose of these provisions is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the electronic transmission of health information."*

I'm a dental hygienist and my state does not recognize dental hygienists as Medicaid contracted providers. So is there any point in requesting an NPI?

Yes. More states have changed their policies in recent years to allow dental hygienists to bill Medicaid directly for covered oral health services. Obtaining an NPI number now means you will be ready once your state becomes part of this trend. (If you move to another state, your NPI number moves with you and remains the same.) If more dental hygienists secure NPIs in your state it could help to build momentum for your state Medicaid agency to update its policies. Allowing dental hygienists to bill directly for services will strengthen the efficiency of school-based sealant programs.

How do I obtain an NPI?

The first step is to create an account by following the instructions on the [NPPES website](#). Then, request an NPI by completing the online application created by the NPPES.

What is a taxonomy code?

A taxonomy code classifies health care providers by the type of services they provide and their area of specialization. When applying for an NPI from NPPES, a health care provider must select the Healthcare Provider Taxonomy Code or code description that best describes the health care provider's type, classification, and specialization. This code or code description must be reported in your NPI application. In some instances, a health care provider might need to report more than one Healthcare Provider Taxonomy Code in order to adequately describe their type, classification, and specialization. For this reason, applicants may select more than one code when applying for an NPI. However, the applicant must choose one of them as their primary code or code description.

How can other dental hygienists be encouraged to request and secure an NPI?

State dental hygienists' associations can raise awareness, provide support to hygienists who are interested and make this a topic at local and state conferences. Dental hygiene education programs can introduce the NPI process into their curricula, establishing an expectation at the dawn of dental hygiene careers that requesting and securing an NPI is worthwhile.

- **Web link** to apply for an NPI: <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/NPPES/Welcome.do>
- **Provider Type Dentistry:** 12
- **Taxonomy for dental hygienist:** 124Q00000X
- This is a professional registration that identifies the dental hygiene as healthcare professionals.
- NPI registration is a critical step to secure Medicaid contracting for dental hygienists.
- Dental hygiene programs should add the NPI process to their curricula within community dental hygiene coursework.