

## What you should know about the MassHealth adult dental cuts.

Prepared by Mass. Law Reform Institute, March 2002; updated November 2002.

**On March 15, 2002 most adults will lose access to most dental services, but there are important exceptions –particularly for people with disabilities.** *Anyone with a disability or illness who may qualify for the special circumstance exception and needs dental work should ask their dentist to request prior authorization by March 25, 2002. If the request goes in on time, you will be able to get dental work pending a decision &, if needed, pending appeal.*

**People with special circumstances** are still eligible for the full range of adult dental services that were covered under the pre-March 15 rules.

1. To fit the special circumstances exception someone must either:

- Have a severe and chronic disability AND
  - Be unable to brush & floss independently & not have actual assistance OR
  - Be unable to communicate pain OR
  - Have a disability that makes routine brushing & flossing insufficient to keep teeth clean
    - *People with disabilities that make their teeth & gums particularly prone to cavities & infection or who must take medicines that make teeth & gums prone to cavities & infection may be protected by this exception; or*
- Have clinical conditions (like HIV or cancer) at a stage where dental infection would likely be life threatening.

2. To get special circumstances

- Your dentist must ask for “prior authorization” (P.A.)
- **If the P.A. request goes in by MARCH 25, 2002,**
  - **You can get the full range of “special circumstances” adult dental services until MassHealth makes a decision on your request.**
  - **If P.A. is denied, and you appeal, you can continue getting the full range of adult dental services until your appeal is decided.**
    - You will still need a separate P.A. for services like crowns and root canals
- If the P.A. request goes in after March 25, 2002, you can’t get the full range of adult dental services until after MassHealth authorizes P.A.
- MassHealth must give prior authorization; it can be good for up to 3 years.

3. To prove special circumstances, the dentist must send in the request along with a letter from the doctor treating you for your disability or illness. The letter from the doctor must:

- Describe your disability and explain why you can’t keep your teeth clean because of your disability or
- Describe your disability and explain that you can’t communicate
- Explain your clinical condition and why an infection would be life threatening.

**People who got prior authorization (P.A.) before MARCH 15, 2002**, for a service that is no longer covered, (like root canals, crowns, or treatment of gum disease) can get the authorized work done, but it must be completed by a deadline. If the work began before March 15, it must

be completed by the date the authorization expires (even if that's after June 30, 2002). If the work doesn't begin until after March 15, 2002, it must be completed by JUNE 30, 2002 even if the authorization doesn't expire until a later date.

- If P.A. was denied before March 15, 2002, but the denial is reversed on appeal, the authorized work can be completed.
- *There may be other situations not identified by the new rules where a P.A. request before March 15, 2002 can protect your right to get the service, for example if MassHealth delayed a decision until after March 15, 2002 or lost the request for P.A.*
- *There may also be situations not directly covered by this rule where P.A. before March 15 will protect you, for example if partial dentures were approved and the teeth that will anchor the partial need fillings, coverage for the fillings may be protected.*

**Some people with certain disabilities or illnesses** who do not have “special circumstances” can still get some additional services.

- People with illnesses or medications that cause “dry mouth” can get topical fluoride treatments.
- Some adults can still get crowns (as an alternative to extractions) and root canals (as an alternative to dentures) if extractions or dentures would create undue medical risk, including but not limited to people with the following conditions:
  - Hemophilia
  - History of radiation therapy
  - Immune disorders
  - Severe physical disabilities such as quadriplegia
  - Profound mental retardation or
  - Profound mental illness

**All adults still eligible for the following services:**

- Emergency services (including emergency x-rays)
- Extractions (teeth pulled)
- Oral surgery

In addition, the following services are still available to adults who need them:

- General anesthesia and IV sedation for office procedures
- Maxillofacial prosthetics
- Hospital admission for covered dental services for certain disabled people
- Oral screening for adults in chemotherapy, radiation or immunosuppressive therapy.

**The new regulations, & notices to consumers, and providers are all available on the MassHealth web site: [www.mass.gov/dma/whatsnw/new\\_IDX.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dma/whatsnw/new_IDX.htm)**

- Also of note, higher reimbursement rates for children's dental services take effect March 16, 2002.

## **MASSHEALTH DENTURE CUT CLARIFICATION - November 4, 2002**

There was some question concerning the extent of the elimination of dentures from the adult dental program in MassHealth. Some reports suggested that dentures would be totally removed from the adult dental program. Other reports suggested that dentures would remain as a treatment option for those with "Special Circumstances." DMA has now clarified its position.

Dentures will remain within the service package only for those adults who have a "Special Circumstances" designation. Dentures will be removed from the service package of the vast majority of adults on MassHealth who do not have a "Special Circumstances" exemption.

The "Special Circumstances" classification was created in last Spring's dental cutbacks. It allows certain adults with severe mental or physical limitations which either result in the member's inability to maintain oral hygiene, or which manifest a clinical condition with which an oral infection might be life-threatening (such as severe immune deficiency) to continue receiving the broader scope of dental services that existed before the March 15th cuts went into effect.

Until now, dentures were one of the few services available to both members with "Special Circumstances" and those without this classification. The Division's current plan is to retain the denture option only for those with "Special Circumstances." For those without a "Special Circumstances" classification, DMA will continue to pay for other limited services such as extractions.