



American Association of Oral  
and Maxillofacial Surgeons

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## ADA Definition of Dentistry

Resolved, that dentistry is defined as the evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body; provided by a dentist, within the scope of his/her education, training and experience, in accordance with the ethics of the profession and applicable law.

(Adopted, American Dental Association House of Delegates, 10/21/97.)

## ADA Definition of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Oral and maxillofacial surgery is a recognized specialty of dentistry. The designation of oral and maxillofacial surgery was adopted by the ADA House of Delegates in 1977 from the previous specialty designation of “oral surgery” to be representative of the procedures performed by oral and maxillofacial surgeons. The ADA definition of the specialty states:

***Oral and maxillofacial surgery is the specialty of dentistry that includes the diagnosis, surgical and adjunctive treatment of diseases, injuries and defects involving both the functional and esthetic aspects of the hard and soft tissues of the oral and maxillofacial regions.***

## A Summary of States' Definitions of Dentistry

### **ADA Definition:**

*The evaluation, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment (nonsurgical, surgical or related procedures) of diseases, disorders and/or conditions of the oral cavity, maxillofacial area and/or the adjacent and associated structures and their impact on the human body; provided by a dentist, within the scope of his/her education, training and experience, in accordance with the ethics of the profession and applicable law.*

*Adopted: ADA Resolution 1997 H 33*

A review of each state's definition of dentistry resulted in classification of four categories of definitions. The first category consists of states that have adopted some form of the ADA definition of dentistry (which is broad and allows more freedom in the procedures a dentist can perform). The second category consists of states with a very short formal definition of dentistry. The third category consists of states that employ only a list of procedures a dentist can perform in defining the practice of dentistry. This is known as the "laundry list." The fourth category consists of states that employ a combination of a formal definition along with a list of duties. The "laundry list," since it has every procedure that a dentist can perform, is more vulnerable to the exclusion of procedures not listed in its definition. The ADA is encouraging all states to adopt the ADA definition of dentistry to allow more flexibility in a dentist's scope of practice.

When looking at the definitions, two key elements were targeted to see if they were included. One element were the words "associated structures," and the other was a statement or sentence emphasizing that dentists could perform procedures that were within the scope of their education. Any definition without these words was noted as a potential problem and those states should be encouraged to adopt the ADA definition of dentistry.

Fourteen (14) states have adopted what is essentially the ADA definition of dentistry. These are Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. All except Illinois amended the definition of dentistry in their Dental Practice Acts. Illinois adopted the ADA definition in a regulation.

Three (3) states have adopted only a brief formal definition of dentistry that predates and is different than the ADA definition. These are Michigan, New York (does not predate ADA definition), North Dakota.

Fifteen (15) states plus the District of Columbia, use a formal definition with a list of procedures to define the practice of dentistry. These are California, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Nineteen (19) states define the practice of dentistry by using only a list of procedures, the so-called "laundry list," that dentist's are able to perform. These were Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine\*, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming.

The following table shows which states do not have the two key elements of the ADA definition identified above.

These states do not include the words “associated structures” in the definition of dentistry:

<b>Alabama</b>	<b>Missouri</b>	<b>Oklahoma</b>
<b>Dist. of Columbia</b>	<b>Montana</b>	<b>Texas</b>
<b>Florida</b>	<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>Utah</b>
<b>Idaho</b>	<b>Nevada</b>	<b>Vermont</b>
<b>Indiana</b>	<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<b>Kansas</b>	<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>
<b>Maine</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Wyoming</b>
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	

These states do not emphasize (in the definition of dentistry) that dentists can perform procedures that are within their scope of education:

<b>Alabama</b>	<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>Ohio</b>
<b>Arkansas</b>	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>Oklahoma</b>
<b>California</b>	<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>Pennsylvania</b>
<b>Colorado</b>	<b>Missouri</b>	<b>South Carolina</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>Montana</b>	<b>South Dakota</b>
<b>Dist. of Columbia</b>	<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>Texas</b>
<b>Florida</b>	<b>Nevada</b>	<b>Utah</b>
<b>Hawaii</b>	<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>Vermont</b>
<b>Idaho</b>	<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>Virginia</b>
<b>Indiana</b>	<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<b>Kansas</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>West Virginia</b>
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>
<b>Maine*</b>	<b>North Dakota</b>	<b>Wyoming</b>

These 14 states have a separate definition of oral-maxillofacial surgery:

<b>California</b>	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>Tennessee</b>
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Mississippi</b>	<b>Texas</b>
<b>Iowa</b>	<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<b>Kansas</b>	<b>Oklahoma</b>	<b>West Virginia</b>
<b>Louisiana</b>	<b>Oregon</b>	

\* Maine – the Board of Dental Examiners has a policy that when deciding whether a regulated dentist is acting within the scope of practice, it will look to the ADA definition to make its determination.