

Dental Hygienist

Clean teeth, read gums and catch disease early. Around \$98,000 a year for a two year degree.

TYPICAL PAY

\$98,100

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$75k to \$126k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Dental offices, community clinics, schools, public health programs, n...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Biology, chemistry and anatomy if offered. Grades matter, because hygiene programs are competitive.
- 2 Prerequisite courses** 1 year
Anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry and English at a community college before you can even apply.
- 3 Accredited hygiene program** 2 years
An associate degree from a program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation, with hundreds of supervised patient hours.
- 4 National written exam** One day
The National Board Dental Hygiene Examination, taken near the end of your program.
- 5 Clinical exam and state license** A few months
A hands-on exam on a real patient, plus your state's law exam, then you register with the state dental board.

Pros and cons

- + Around \$98,000 a year for a two year community college degree
- + Daytime hours and genuinely accepted part-time work
- + Licensed and in demand in every part of the country
- Getting into an accredited program is harder than finishing one
- Repetitive strain in the hands, wrists, neck and shoulders is common
- Pay stops climbing early. There is no promotion inside the chair

Optional boosts

Local anesthesia permit. Nitrous oxide monitoring. Public health hygiene. Teaching.

Good to know

It is one of the best paid two year degrees in the country

Very few jobs pay near six figures after a community college associate degree. Dental hygiene does, which is exactly why the programs are so competitive to get into.

The profession started in 1913

A Connecticut dentist, Alfred Fones, trained his cousin Irene Newman and opened the first school for dental hygienists. The whole idea was prevention: cleaning teeth before they needed drilling, especially for...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Dental Hygienists (29-1292.00)
American Dental Hygienists' Association
Commission on Dental Accreditation
American Dental Association

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/dental-hygienist>



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