



The relevance of the endemic COVID-19 transition to oral and maxillofacial surgeons

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Korea has three times more new daily coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases per capita than the peak records for the United States and the United Kingdom due to the recent sporadic spread of Omicron, a variant of the COVID-19 virus. It is predicted that this pandemic will transition to the endemic category in Korea. Efforts have been made to reduce infection as much as possible in Korea, but Omicron is highly contagious and people are exhausted by long-term social distancing. Fortunately, although the start of vaccination in Korea was delayed compared to other countries, as of April 3rd, 2022, the second booster vaccination rate was 86.7% of total population and the third booster vaccination rate was 63.9%¹. Considering that vaccination for children under the age of 12 is just beginning, more than 95% of the population over the age of 12 has received a second or third dose. Based on this high vaccination rate and the resulting low fatality rate, Korea is gradually easing quarantine requirements despite the high infection rate. Korea has one of the highest rates of adult immunization, strong trust in its public health system, and the means to overcome the pandemic, which is why the *Wall Street Journal* of the United States predicted Korea would be the first country in the world to transition into an endemic phase of COVID-19².

Although the fatality rate is low, many patients are suffering from infection, and even after the one-week quarantine period is over, many are complaining of sequelae.

When COVID-19 was first spreading, oral and maxillo-

facial treatment was postponed as much as possible due to aerosol formation during dental procedures. Dental healthcare teams including oral and maxillofacial surgeons were classified as a high risk group for COVID-19 infection³. However, when personal protective equipment is used appropriately, virus transmission caused by saliva droplets is not a serious concern⁴.

Shifting from the pandemic to endemic phase does not mean the risk of viral infection is reduced or eliminated. It means a change in perception on the spread of the virus as somewhat subdued and controllable. In particular, since variants are constantly appearing and patterns of variation are poorly understood, people must be still careful about infection, and must not neglect reasonable prevention. This also applies to clinics and operating rooms. In addition, considering that many dental care staff working in the oral and maxillofacial surgery department face potential exposure to several viral infections by saliva, it is necessary to focus on protecting against the viral infections as well as COVID-19 infection.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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