Guidance for Dental Practices Facing Contaminated Water Situations

In the event of water contamination, dental practices must take specific precautions to ensure the safety of patients and staff. Dental devices such as waterlines, autoclaves, air compressors, and waterline treatment systems can pose serious risks if damaged or contaminated. The degree of water damage will vary by practice, but equipment submerged in water is likely unsalvageable due to electrical and corrosion issues. Always consult the manufacturer for instructions on cleaning, disinfection, and damage assessment. If manufacturer guidance isn't available, it is safest to discontinue use of the equipment until it is deemed safe.

For Dental Units and Clinics:

- Avoid Using Contaminated Water: Do not deliver potentially contaminated water through dental unit waterlines (DUWL).
- Isolated Water Supply: Dental units may still be used if isolated from the municipal water supply by an FDA-cleared water treatment device or self-contained water reservoir.
- Patient Rinsing: Ensure patients rinse with bottled or distilled water until the boil water advisory is lifted.

Sterilization and Infection Control:

- Steam Sterilizers: Autoclaves and other sterilization devices should be carefully inspected for any signs of damage due to contaminated water or flooding. If the device has been compromised, it may not function properly and should be serviced before use.
- Instrument Handling: Use only boiled or bottled water when manually scrubbing or cleaning instruments before sterilization, especially when water contamination is suspected.

General Practice Considerations:

- Air Compressors: Dental air compressors may also be compromised if exposed to contaminated water. Ensure they are fully inspected and deemed safe by the manufacturer before using them to avoid contamination during procedures.
- Post-Advisory Cleaning: Once the advisory is lifted, flush dental unit waterlines according to the manufacturer's recommendations. This process is crucial to clearing out any contaminated water that may have entered the system.
- Testing Waterlines: After flushing, consider testing your waterlines to ensure they meet safety standards before resuming normal operations.

In summary, always err on the side of caution with any device that may have come into contact with contaminated water. Taking these steps will help protect both your patients and your practice.

For further details, please refer to the following CDC guidelines:

- Reopening Healthcare Facilities | Natural Disasters and Severe Weather
- Healthcare Water System Repair | Natural Disasters and Severe Weather
- Drinking Water Advisory Communication Toolbox