



ORAL CANCER

Oral cancer will be found in an estimated 43,000 Americans this year and will cause close to 8,000 deaths. Only about 57 percent of those who develop the disease will live longer than five years.¹

Oral cancer is particularly dangerous because it might go unnoticed for a long period of time. Lesions may appear benign and produce no pain.¹

Who is at risk for developing oral cancer?

People who use tobacco and excessive alcohol increase their risk of oral cancer.¹ People who spend a great deal of time in the sun also may have a higher risk for lip cancer.

More than 90 percent of all oral cancers are found in people 45 years of age and older, but oral cancer can happen at any age. Men develop oral cancer twice as often as women, and it occurs more often in African Americans than in Caucasians.¹

What are the symptoms of oral cancer?

The number of deaths from oral cancer can be reduced if the cancer is found and treated early. Changes in your mouth that may signal the start of oral cancer often may not be seen or felt easily, as lesions may appear benign and may not be painful. A person may find these changes by doing a monthly exam of his or her mouth. Look for these symptoms, which are some of the warning signs of oral cancer:

- A lump or thick spot in your cheek that can be felt with your tongue
- A white or red patch on your gums, tongue, or anywhere in your mouth that does not go away within two weeks
- Soreness or a feeling that something is caught in your throat
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing your food
- Difficulty moving your jaw or tongue
- Numbness of your tongue or other parts of your mouth
- Swelling of your upper or lower jaw that causes your dentures to fit poorly or hurt your mouth
- Common areas for oral cancer to develop in the front of the mouth are on the tongue and the floor of the mouth.^{1,2}

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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These are not sure signs of cancer. They also can be caused by many other conditions. It is important to see a dentist or physician if any of these problems continue for more than two weeks. Pain is usually not a sign of oral cancer. Annual visits to a dentist's office are recommended for a professional oral cancer examination.²

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-744-4554 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. The Oral Cancer Foundation. August 2014. *Oral Cancer Facts*. In Oral Cancer Foundation. Retrieved February 12, 2015 from: <http://www.oralcancerfoundation.org/facts/>
2. American Dental Association. 2014. *Oral Cancer*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved February 12, 2015 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/o/oral-cancer>