

Oral Cancer

**Early Detection
Saves Lives**

Are You at Risk?

What Are the Signs
and Symptoms?

Should You Have an
Oral Cancer Exam?



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About Oral Cancer

Oral cancer includes cancers of the mouth and pharynx. Pharynx is pronounced “fair-inks.” It means the back of the throat.

Oral cancer accounts for roughly 3% of all new cancers diagnosed annually in the United States.

Approximately 53,000 people will be diagnosed with oral cancer each year, and about 10,800 people will die from the disease.

On average, 66% of those with the disease will survive 5 years or more.

Oral cancer most often occurs in people 55 to 64 years of age. Men are twice as likely as women to get oral cancer.

What Puts Someone at Risk?

Tobacco and alcohol use. Tobacco use of any kind, including cigarette smoking, puts you at risk. Heavy alcohol use also increases your chances of developing the disease. Using tobacco plus alcohol poses a much greater risk than using either substance alone.

HPV. Oral cancer is the most common cancer linked to human papillomavirus (HPV). Ask your health care provider about the HPV vaccine for cancer prevention.

Age. Risk increases with age. Oral cancer most often occurs in people over the age of 40.

Sun exposure. Cancer of the lip can be caused by sun exposure.

Possible Signs and Symptoms

See a dentist or physician if any of the following symptoms lasts for more than 2 weeks:

- A sore, irritation, lump, or thick patch in your mouth, lip, or throat
- A white or red patch in your mouth
- A sore throat or a feeling that something is caught in your throat
- Hoarseness
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or speaking
- Difficulty moving your jaw or tongue
- Numbness in your tongue or other areas of your mouth
- Swelling of the jaw; if you wear dentures, this could feel like your dentures have become uncomfortable or no longer fit right
- Ear pain

Early Detection

It is important to find oral cancer as early as possible when it can be treated more successfully—so, see your dentist regularly even if you have no natural teeth remaining or have dentures.

An oral cancer examination can detect early signs of cancer. The exam is painless and takes only a few minutes.

Your routine dental check-up is an excellent opportunity to have the exam. During the exam, ask your dentist or dental hygienist to check your face, neck, lips, and entire mouth for possible signs of cancer.

Some parts of the pharynx are not visible during an oral cancer exam. Talk to your dentist about whether a specialist should check your pharynx.

For more information about oral cancer, talk to your dentist or visit:

- nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/oral-cancer
- cancer.gov/types/head-and-neck



HRSA
Health Resources & Services Administration



To learn more, scan the code using your smartphone camera app, or visit:

hrsa.gov/oral-health

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