



American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons

April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month

Dental associations urge regular oral cancer examinations—early detection saves lives!

Rosemont, IL (April 1, 2017) - Every hour, 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year, someone dies of oral or oropharyngeal cancer (cancer of the mouth and upper throat). Yet, if oral cancer is detected and treated early, treatment-related health problems are reduced and survival rates may increase.

This year an estimated 49,750¹ new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed. Of those individuals, 40 percent will not survive longer than five years, and many who do survive suffer long-term problems, such as severe facial disfigurement or difficulties with eating and speaking. The death rate associated with oral and oropharyngeal cancers remains particularly high because the cancers routinely are discovered late in their development.

This April, the nation observes the 18th Annual Oral Cancer Awareness Month and the American Academy of Oral Medicine, American Academy of Periodontology, the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, and the American Dental Hygienists' Association join the non-profit Oral Cancer Foundation in its campaign to raise awareness of oral cancer screenings and the importance of early detection.

Regular oral cancer examinations performed by oral health professionals remain the best method for detecting oral cancer in its early stages.

Be mindful of symptoms

In between dental visits, the public is encouraged to regularly check for signs and symptoms, and see a dental professional if they do not improve or disappear after two to three weeks:

- Any sore or ulceration that does not heal within 14 days.
- A red, white, or black discoloration of the soft tissues of the mouth.
- Any abnormality that bleeds easily when touched (friable).
- A lump or hard spot in the tissue, usually border of the tongue (induration).
- Tissue raised above that which surrounds it; a growth (exophytic).
- A sore under a denture, which even after adjustment of the denture, that does not heal.
- A lump or thickening that develops in the mouth.
- A painless, firm, fixated lump felt on the outside of the neck, which has been there for at least two weeks.
- All the above symptoms have the commonality of being persistent and not resolving.

HPV-caused oropharyngeal cancer may present with one or more of the following persistent (longer than two to three weeks) signs and symptoms:

- Hoarseness or sore throat that does not resolve within a few weeks.
- A painless, firm, fixated lump felt on the outside of the neck, which has been there for at least two weeks.
- Constant coughing that does not resolve after many days.

¹ SEER – National Vital Statistics Reports, Dec. 2013.

- Difficulty swallowing; a sensation that food is getting caught in your throat.
- An earache on one side (unilateral) that persists for more than a few days.
- All the above symptoms have the commonality of being persistent and not resolving.

Always contact a dental professional right away if there are any immediate concerns.

Risk Factors

Research has identified a number of factors that may contribute to the development of oral and oropharyngeal cancers. Historically, those at an especially high risk of developing oral cancer have been heavy drinkers and smokers older than age 50, but today the cancer also is occurring more frequently in non-smokers due to HPV16, the virus most commonly associated with cervical cancer.

The sexually transmitted human papillomavirus 16 (HPV) is related to the increasing incidence of oropharyngeal cancer (most commonly involving lymphoid tissue occurring in the tonsils or the base of the tongue). Approximately 99 percent of people who develop an HPV oral infection will clear the virus on their own. In approximately 1 percent of individuals the immune system will not clear the virus and it can lay dormant for decades before potentially causing a cancer, this occurs mostly in a non-smoking population composed of males four to one over females.

For those who have never had an oral cancer examination, there is no better time to schedule one than during Oral Cancer Awareness Month in April. Be sure to ask that this examination be made a routine part of all of future dental check-ups. For a list of local dental professionals who are participating in this year's event by offering free oral cancer screenings, visit the [Oral Cancer Foundation's website](#).

For more information about oral cancer and its diagnosis and treatment, visit the following organizations' websites.

About Oral Cancer Awareness Month

Each April, some of the nation's top dental associations join together with the Oral Cancer Foundation to raise awareness for oral and oropharyngeal cancers. This is an important reminder to the public that when these cancers are detected and treated early, mortality and treatment-related health problems are reduced.

For more information visit the Oral Cancer Foundation website at www.oralcancer.org. Sponsors include the Academy of General Dentistry (agd.org), the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology (aaomp.org), the American Academy of Oral Medicine (aaom.com), the American Academy of Periodontology (perio.org), the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (MyOMS.org), and the American Dental Hygienists' Association (adha.org).