



Oral Cancer Fact Sheet

Prevalence

- An estimated 49,750 new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed each year.
- Oral cancer will claim 9,750 lives annually.
- On average, 57 percent of those with the disease will survive more than five years.
- Oral cancer affects almost twice as many men as women.

Risk Factors

- An estimated 25 percent of oral cancer patients have no known risk factors.
- Alcohol and tobacco remain the greatest risk factors (and using them in combination increases the risk 15 times over the use of one or the other).
- Infection with the sexually transmitted HPV16 virus has been linked to a subset of oral cancers.
- Historically, oral cancer has been a disease of those ages 40+, but its incidence in those under 40 is climbing.
- Prolonged sun or tanning bed exposure is a risk factor for lip cancer.
- Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to cigarettes – users face a 400 percent greater chance of oral cancer than non-users.

Possible Signs and Symptoms

While you may have no symptoms at all, you should see your oral and maxillofacial surgeon or dentist if you experience any of the following:

- A sore on the lip or in the mouth that does not heal.
- A lump or thickening on the lips or gums or in the mouth.
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, tonsils or lining of the mouth.
- Bleeding, pain or numbness in the lip or mouth.
- Change in voice.
- Loose teeth or dentures that no longer fit well.
- Trouble chewing or swallowing or moving the tongue or jaw.
- Swelling of the jaw.
- Sore throat or feeling that something is caught in the throat.

Early Detection

- Performing a self-examination regularly increases the chance of identifying changes or new growths early.
- If you have risk factors, also see your oral and maxillofacial surgeon or dentist for an oral examination at least annually.
- The earlier the cancer is detected, the easier the treatment and the greater the chance of a cure.

Sources: Oral Cancer Foundation, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health