



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, 2016) - 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 48,250¹ 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 difficulties with eating and speaking or facial disfigurement. 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 17th Annual Oral Cancer Awareness Month and the American Academy of Oral Medicine, American Academy of Periodontology, the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, the American Dental Association, and the American Dental Hygienists' Association join the 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 your oral health professional 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-three weeks:

- a sore, or soreness or irritation that doesn't go away
- red or white patches, or pain, tenderness, or numbness in mouth or lips
- lumps, thickening tissues, rough spots, crusty or eroded areas
- difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving your jaw or tongue
- a change in the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth

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

- a painless lump or swelling felt in the neck

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

- sore throat, difficulty swallowing, or pain when swallowing
- swelling of the tonsillar areas at the back of the mouth

Always call your dentist 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 younger, nonsmoking people due to HPV, 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) in a younger, non-smoking population composed of males four to one over females.

If you have never had an oral cancer examination, there is no better time to schedule one than during Oral Cancer Awareness Month in April. When you do, be sure to ask that this examination be made a routine part of all of your 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 Web site](#).

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

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 and remind 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 Web site at www.oralcancer.org.

Sponsors include the American Academy of Oral Medicine (aaom.com), American Academy of Periodontology (perio.org), the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (MyOMS.org), the American Dental Association (ada.org), and the American Dental Hygienists' Association (adha.org)