



Oral Cancer

Oral Cancer occurs more often in people who use tobacco such as cigarettes, chewing tobacco, pipes, and cigars; or in those who consume large amounts of alcohol. However, oral cancer can and does develop in people of all ages, races, and lifestyle habits. Over 25% of oral cancers occur in people who do not smoke and who only drink socially.

When oral cancer is detected early by your dentist, the chances of a complete cure are highest. Oral “sores” or “lesions” are extremely common. The vast majority are harmless, but some are potentially dangerous, and if not identified early, they may progress to a more advanced stage.

When detected in its later stages, oral cancer is a devastating disease. Treatment at the later stage usually involves major facial surgery with only 50% of such patients surviving past 5 years.

Early Signs of Oral Cancer

- Often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth
- A sore that bleeds easily and does not heal
- Color changes of the oral tissue
- A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area
- Pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips

The most important advances in fighting cancer have come from early detection. For example, the examination of skin moles for melanoma, the pap smear for cervical cancer, the rectal exam and PSA test for prostate cancer, and the physical exam and mammogram for breast cancer. Therefore, it is important to see your dentist regularly so that dangerous oral lesions can be detected at an early, more easily curable stage.

Misconceptions & Facts

Misconception: Many people don't die from oral cancer.

Fact: Oral cancer affects more than 30,000 Americans each year claiming over 8,000 lives as compared to melanoma and cervical cancer, which account for approximately 8,000 and 5,000 deaths per year, respectively.

Misconception: Only those people who smoke and drink alcohol regularly are at risk for developing oral cancer.

Fact: Although most often associated with smoking, over 25% of oral cancer victims have not used tobacco, and have no other know risk factors.

Misconception: Common sores in the mouth are little cause for concern.

Fact: In the majority of the cases, common sores are usually benign, but they should be tested for abnormalities as a safeguard. According to studies, between 5 and 15% of adults have benign-appearing white or red sore in their mouth that could be pre-cancerous. It is crucial to identify these lesions in the earliest, most curable stage.

Misconception: Oral cancer examinations are painful.

Fact: If a dentist identifies a suspicious lesion in your mouth, he can now use a new, painless brush biopsy system that is performed on lesions to determine if there are any potentially cancerous cells present.

Misconception: Oral cancer lesions are easily identified.

Fact: In the earliest, most treatable stage, oral precancerous and cancerous lesions appear similar to harmless, small white or red sores. Therefore, it is very difficult for a dentist to visually identify which lesions are harmful. If not detected early, these benign-looking but dangerous sores can progress to more advanced, malignant stages. OralCDx can identify oral lesions that are potentially dangerous, even when they do not look suspicious.