

ORAL CANCER

Cancer is referred to as an abnormal and uncontrolled cellular growth. Oral cancer is a broad term that refers to any cancer in the mouth and throat region. It belongs to a larger group of cancers called head and neck cancers.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Where in the mouth or throat might oral cancer occur?*

Oral cancer can occur in both the soft and hard tissues of the mouth and throat.

- Examples of soft tissue are the lips, tongue, floor of the mouth, salivary glands and the lymphatic tissue.
- Examples of hard tissue are the bones of the upper and lower jaws as well as the roof of the mouth.

2. *What are some of the common risk factors associated with oral cancer?*

- The use of tobacco products: Either by smoking, chewing or vaping.
- Excessive alcohol consumption.
- Excessive exposure to the sun.
- Previous Human Papillomavirus [HPV] infection.
- Increasing age especially 40-60 years old.
- Poor nutrition.

3. *What are some of the signs and symptoms of oral cancer?*

- A soreness or feeling that something is in the back of the throat.
- Difficulty in swallowing, chewing or moving the lower jaw or tongue.
- Unexplained numbness or tingling in the lips, face or tongue.
- A change in the voice, or a continuing hoarseness or cough.
- A persistent rough spot, lump or bump anywhere in or around the mouth or neck.
- An ulcer, or red white or black patch that does not go away.
- A hard unexplained swelling on the outside of your neck.

4. *How can the risk of oral cancer be reduced?*

- Avoid the use of tobacco products.
- Reduce excessive alcohol consumption.
- Limit exposure to the sun and use a sunblock on the lips.
- Be vaccinated against HPV.
- Eat a healthy nutritious diet.

5. *In what ways may oral cancer be detected?*

- Physical Examination: Oral cancer is often found by dentists and physicians during routine check-ups and physical examinations, by looking for changes in the tissues around the mouth or neck.
- Endoscopy using a small camera inserted through the nose or mouth to view areas of the mouth and throat.
- Imaging of suspicious areas by the use of X-rays, Computed Tomography [CT], Magnetic Resonance Imaging [MRI] or Positron Emission Tomography [PET] scans.
- Biopsy, involving removing a small piece of tissue for microscopic examination.
- Ultrasound to look for nodules in the neck.

6. *What are some of the treatments for oral cancer?*

- Oral cancer stages are indicated using Roman numerals 1 through IV. A lower stage such as stage 1 indicates a smaller cancer confined to one area. A higher stage such as stage IV indicates a larger cancer or one that has spread. The stage of the cancer will help determine the treatment choice.
- Besides the stage, treatment will depend on the cancer's location as well as a person's overall health and personal choice.