

FOR PATIENTS



Looking for Oral Cancer

Dentists are an important front line defense in the battle against cancer of the mouth, or oral cancer. Don't be alarmed if your dentist checks your mouth for cancer. Dentists should screen patients for signs of cancer as part of their routine exam.



How dentists do an oral cancer exam

The oral cancer exam takes only a few minutes. Your dentist will examine your face, neck, lips, and entire mouth for possible signs of cancer. Watch a video, The Oral Cancer Exam, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rubX2CMRjCA>, to learn more.



About oral cancer

Oral cancers can appear anywhere in your mouth: on or under your tongue, in the tissue lining your mouth and gums, or on your throat at the back of your mouth (your pharynx). About 3 percent of all cancers diagnosed yearly in the United States are oral cancer.

- Approximately 51,540 people had oral or pharyngeal cancer in the United States in 2018, and there were 10,030 patient deaths.
- Oral cancer most commonly occurs in people over the age of 40.
- Early detection is important. Oral cancer can spread quickly and it's easier to treat if found early.

If you have signs of oral cancer, your dentist may refer you to a specialist.



Your dentist is part of the National Dental Practice-

Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and also do dental research. For more information go to www.nationaldentalpbrn.org.

A 2017 study of more than 1,000 dentists from across the country found that in one year:

Most dentists—

87%—

found a suspicious change in at least one patient.

15%

found at least one oral cancer.

Looking for Oral Cancer



What factors increase your oral cancer risk?

Men are nearly twice as likely as women to have oral cancer. African American men are at a particularly high risk of death from the disease. Increased age is another factor.



When to call your doctor

Even if it's not time for your regular dental exam, see a dentist or physician if you have any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks:

- A lump, sore, or thick patch in your mouth or throat or on your lip
- A white or red patch in your mouth
- A feeling that something is caught in your throat
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Difficulty moving your jaw or tongue
- Numbness in your tongue or other areas of your mouth
- Swelling of your jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable



For more information

Oral Cancer at <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/oral-cancer>

Steps to lower risk



Don't use tobacco of any kind, including cigarettes.



Don't drink alcohol excessively.



If you smoke, don't drink heavily. Doing both poses a much greater risk than doing only one or the other.



Talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect yourself against the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (HPV 16). Learn more about HPV at <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>.



Avoid too much sun exposure. It can cause cancer of the lip.



Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables—eating too few may play a role in the development of oral cancer.