



FOR PRACTITIONERS



Looking for—and Detecting—Oral Cancer

This update is based on research conducted by dentists who are part of the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and do dental research. For more information go to www.nationaldentalpbrn.org.



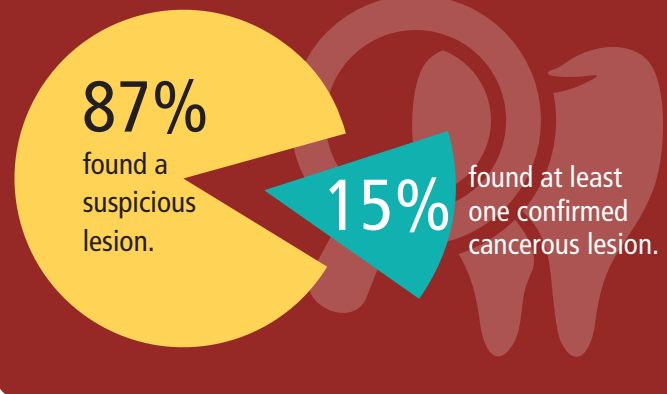
Thank you to everyone who participated in this study. To provide the best dental care, we need to do “real world” studies like this one, and that wouldn’t be possible without our Network members’ help!

Research suggests that general dentists are discovering a considerable proportion of oral cancer cases in the United States.

The oral cancer exam can be done quickly. It involves examining the patient’s oral cavity, lips, face, head, and neck to identify early signs of cancer. Dentists should perform the exam even if the patient hasn’t mentioned any symptoms. Early detection is critical; mortality and morbidity increase as the cancer progresses.

“Dentists appear to be an important front line in the battle against oral cancer,” Walter Psoter, DDS, PhD, said in a 2017 presentation, “The Common Practices of Head and Neck Examinations in U.S. Dental Offices,” describing a National Dental Practice-Based Research Network study. He and his colleagues conducted the study in 2017 at University of Rochester’s Eastman Institute for Oral Health, where Dr. Psoter is an associate professor.

Among the study participants:



For the study, 1,073 general practitioners completed an online questionnaire about clinical, management, and administrative practices related to oral lesions.

Based on the study results, the authors estimated that dentists discover between 22,163 and 26,595 cases of oral cancer a year, and possibly significantly more. Due to the lack of clinical studies demonstrating the importance of the oral cancer exam, many dentists may perceive that the exam isn’t effective.



Patients can lower their risk by:



Not using tobacco of any kind, including cigarettes.



Not drinking alcohol excessively.



Not smoking and drinking excessively. Doing both more than doubles the patient's risk.



Avoiding too much sun exposure, which can cause cancer of the lip.



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

For your patients

NIDCR has an educational video for patients, *The Oral Cancer Exam*, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=rubX2CMRJcA.

NIDCR also has patient information that you can order or download, including a brochure, *The Oral Cancer Exam*, and a card describing the oral cancer exam. The brochure is at <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2018-10/oral-cancer-exam.pdf>. A brochure written for African American men, *Are You at Risk for Oral Cancer? What African American Men Need To Know*, is at <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/oral-cancer-aa-brochure.pdf>.

More information

National Cancer Institute. Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. *Cancer Stat Facts: Oral Cavity and Pharynx Cancer*, available at <https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/oralcav.html>

Reference

Psoter WJ, for the National Dental PBRN Collaborative Group. "The Common Practices of Head and Neck Examinations in U.S. Dental Offices." Presentation at the Eastman Institute for Oral Health Centennial Celebration. Rochester, NY. June 09, 2017.



Which dentists found more suspicious or cancerous lesions?

- Women dentists found more suspicious lesions than men, but not more confirmed cancer cases.
- Participants from the Network's South Atlantic region had a higher rate of discovering confirmed cancers than those in other regions.
- Dentists with a higher proportion of patients over age 65 also found more confirmed cancer.
- Dentists who had been in practice longer found fewer suspicious lesions but more confirmed cancers.



About oral cancer

Approximately 51,540 people were diagnosed with oral cavity and pharynx cancers in the United States in 2018, and 10,030 people died from them.

Men are about twice as likely as women to have oral cancer. African American men are at a high risk of dying from the disease. Infection with the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (specifically HPV 16) has been linked to oral-pharyngeal cancers. The risk for oral cancer also increases with tobacco and excessive alcohol use. It's more common as we age.



How to do an oral cancer exam

The American Dental Association's 5-minute video, *How To Evaluate for Potentially Malignant Disorders and Oral Cancer*, is based on the recommendations of the American Dental Association's 2017 "Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation of Potentially Malignant Disorders in the Oral Cavity." The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mv073MJzlg>.

For more information on oral cancer and the oral cancer exam, see the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research's (NIDCR) two-page brochure, *Detecting Oral Cancer: A Guide for Health Care Professionals*. Materials are available at <https://catalog.nidcr.nih.gov/OrderPublications/#6>.