



## Oral Cancer

Dental professionals have always known that dental evaluations lend themselves to detecting a multitude of systemic conditions, which include diabetes, heart disease and cancer. The early detection of oral cancer is one condition that has the potential to save thousands of lives.

### Oral Cancer Health Facts

- Each year oral cancer claims as many lives as skin cancer and more than cervical cancer.
- This year in the U.S., 8,000 people will die from oral cancer and over 30,000 new cases will be diagnosed.
- Despite medical advances for most cancers, the five-year survival rate for oral cancer hasn't improved from 57 percent in 40 years because the disease has been difficult to detect in its earliest stages.
- If detected early, the survival rate dramatically increases to 81 percent.
- Oral cancer can be prevented at its precancerous stage.
- The average cost for treating an advanced case of oral cancer is \$200,000 – making it one of the most expensive cancers to treat.

Many dental offices perform a free oral cancer examination during routine check-ups – looking for certain indicators and palpating (feeling) for lumps or irregular tissue changes in your mouth, head and neck. A biopsy will be conducted on any suspected areas.

### Oral Cancer Risk Factors

- Risk factors for oral cancer include smoking, tobacco chewing and drinking alcohol.
- While oral cancer is often associated with these risk factors, studies indicate that 25 percent of cases have no risk factors at all.
- The incidence of oral cancer is rising in women, those under 40 and nonsmokers.

### OralCDx Brush Biopsy

The OralCDx brush biopsy is the newest tool in the early detection of oral cancer/precancerous cells – and represents a major breakthrough in the fight against oral cancer. With this technique, the dentist uses a small brush to easily collect tissue cells and sends the sample to a laboratory for testing and diagnosis.

The procedure is indicated to evaluate unexplained tiny white and red lesions – and the software used to analyze the samples can spot a precancerous/cancerous cell even if it is partially obscured by other cells. Helping to save lives by differentiating a pre-cancer or early cancerous spot from a benign one, the brush biopsy analysis method from OralCDx has been extensively studied and is approved by the American Dental Association.

And, your Delta Dental of Illinois plan covers the OralCDx brush biopsy, if oral surgery coverage is included in the plan\*.

### What You Can Do to Check for Oral Cancer

While the potential for oral cancer may be genetically inherited, the risk increases for smokers, spit tobacco users, those with too much exposure to sunlight and individuals who consume excessive amounts of alcohol. Habits such as lip or cheek biting and ill-fitting dentures also heighten the risk of developing oral cancer.

The most prevalent oral cancer sites are the tongue, floor of the mouth and the soft palate. However, oral cancer may also be found on the lips, cheeks or gums.

In addition to regular check-ups, you can perform self-examinations to look for early warning signs. Basically, look for anything out of the ordinary, especially a lump that increases in size; a sore that doesn't heal within two weeks; and/or changes in the appearance of soft tissue. Other early warning signs are persistent bleeding from the throat or mouth, difficulty swallowing, constant hoarseness, and numbness anywhere in the mouth.

To perform your own oral cancer examination, start in one area and consistently follow a pattern of observation and palpation.

- Face and neck - Using a mirror and your nose as the dividing line, look for lumps or swellings that appear on only one side. Look for size or color changes in moles or other growths. With your fingers, press the sides and front of your neck, feeling for lumps or tenderness.
- Lips - Pull your lip down or up to observe any sores or color changes. Run your lip between your thumb and forefinger, feeling for lumps or changes in texture.
- Cheeks, roof of the mouth, floor of the mouth, tongue, and gums - Look for red, white or dark patches or open sores. Feel for lumps and bumps.

Oral cancer is painless in the early stages. With early discovery and treatment, survival rates greatly increase. If you detect any of these early warning signs, call or see your dentist immediately.

\*The OralCDx brush biopsy is standardly covered under oral surgery in Delta Dental of Illinois' plans.