

Over **700** cases
of mouth, head
and neck cancer
are detected in
Ireland each year

Do you know
the signs?

Oral Cancer

Do you know the signs? Did you know that dentists can look for signs of oral cancer during routine dental exams?

There are more than 700 cases of cancer of the mouth, head and neck reported in Ireland every year.

About half of all mouth cancers are diagnosed at an early stage. Earlier diagnosis results in easier treatment, better outcomes and a higher quality of life after treatment.

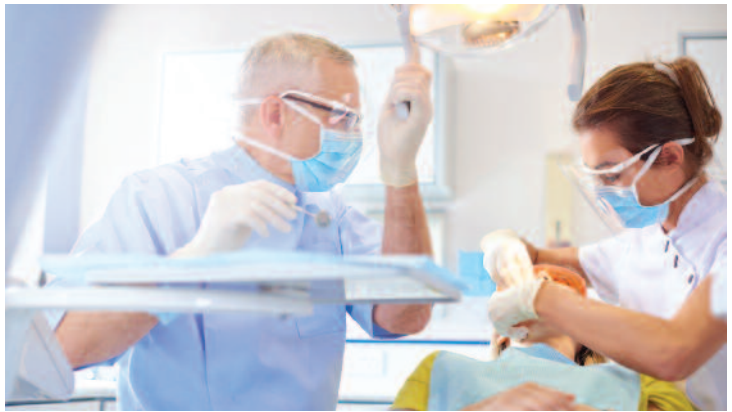
A regular checkup with your dentist should include an examination of the entire mouth for early detection of cancerous and precancerous conditions. You should also know what to look for while cleaning your mouth. If you observe any of the telltale signs listed below, make sure to see your dentist so that any relevant signs or symptoms can be evaluated.

Check Your Mouth Frequently

Mouth cancer can affect the lips, gums, cheeks, tongue, palate, tonsil, throat, salivary glands, nose and voice box (larynx).

Some of the telltale signs may include

- A sore or ulcer in your mouth or on the lip that does not heal
- Difficulty or pain on chewing and swallowing
- Persistent sore throat, hoarse voice or difficulty speaking
- Unexplained loose tooth
- A lump in the mouth or neck
- Persistent pain in the face or jaw
- Numbness of the tongue or face
- Persistent nose bleeds and blocked or stuffy nose
- Persistent white or red patches on the inside lining of the mouth or on the tongue



The Value of an Oral Examination

Most mouth cancers can be detected at an early stage by a simple screening examination as part of a regular dental check up. If the dentist can find an obvious cause for the signs or symptoms, he or she may be able to treat promptly and check for signs of healing subsequently. Some signs may require a more detailed investigation including a biopsy or referral to a specialist centre. Regular dental checkups are essential to prevent late diagnosis of mouth cancer.

Risk Factors

Mouth cancer occurs more frequently in men than women, particularly in men over the age of 50. This trend is changing with the incidence in women, including younger women, increasing at a rate of 3% a year since 1994.

Factors that can increase risk of mouth cancer:

- Smoking or tobacco chewing combined with heavy alcohol consumption, especially spirits
- Prolonged exposure of facial area to sunshine, especially amongst farmers and gardeners
- Working with certain chemicals or dusts increases risk of cancer in nasal area
- Not availing of HPV vaccine when made available
- Diet low in fruit and vegetables increases risk of mouth cancer

A good dental health routine, including regular dental checkups combined with increased awareness of the signs and symptoms, availing of HPV vaccine when made available plays an important role in the prevention, early detection and treatment of mouth cancers.

Sources:

1. Irish Cancer Society: www.cancer.ie
2. The National Cancer Registry Ireland: www.ncri.ie
3. Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
4. The simple facts about Mouth Cancer; B.E.McCartan, Marie Keating Foundation: www.mariekeating.com

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