

Signs and Symptoms of Oral Cancer



Oral cancer is the sixth most common cancer in the world, accounting for 30,000 newly diagnosed cases and 8,000 deaths each year.¹ If not diagnosed and treated in its early stages, oral cancer can spread, leading to chronic pain, loss of function, facial and oral disfigurement and even death.

Who faces the highest risk of oral cancer?

Anyone can get oral cancer, but heavy drinkers and people who smoke or use other tobacco products are at higher risk. Though it's most common in people over age 50, new research indicates that younger people may develop oral cancers related to human papillomavirus (HPV).

Early detection can save lives

The earlier oral cancer is detected and treated, the better the survival rate. Regular dental checkups are covered at no or low cost under most Delta Dental of Washington's plans, so you can make sure you're getting a professional's help in avoiding cancer.

Minimize your risk for oral cancer

- Stopping the use of tobacco of any kind (or better yet never start)
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoiding excessive sun exposure
- Getting the HPV vaccine

Warning signs of oral cancer

The early warning signs might go unnoticed because they're often painless or look like other, non-emergent issues. The signs and symptoms of oral cancer might include:

- Persistent lip sores or mouth ulcers
- Pain or numbness in the lips, mouth, ears, or throat
- Red or white patches on the inside of the mouth
- A growth, lump, rough spot, or eroded area inside the mouth
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Difficulty speaking or moving your tongue or jaw
- Loose teeth or a change in the way your bite fits together

The most important thing is to keep a close eye on these issues once you've noticed them. If they don't heal within 14 days, contact your dentist to schedule an exam.

NOTE: This is for informational purposes only. If you have any concerns or questions, please reach out to your medical provider.



1. National Center for Biotechnology Information. (2017). The role of microglia in the healthy brain.

If you have a question, give us a call. We're happy to help.

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