

## Oral Cancer

Oral cancer, a subtype of head and neck cancer, is any cancerous tissue growth located in the oral cavity. It may arise as a primary lesion originating in any of the oral tissues, by metastasis from a distant site of origin, or by extension from a neighboring anatomic structure, such as the nasal cavity or the maxillary sinus. By far the most common oral cancer is squamous cell carcinoma, which originates in the tissues that line the mouth and lips. Oral cancer most commonly involves the tissue of the lips or the tongue. It may also occur on the floor of the mouth, cheek lining, gingiva (gums), or palate (roof of the mouth). Most oral cancers look very similar under the microscope and are called squamous cell carcinoma. These are malignant and tend to spread rapidly.

### You Should Know

- Oral cancer often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth.
- It can affect any area of the oral cavity including the lips, gum tissue, cheek lining, tongue, and the hard or soft palate.
- Other signs include:
  - > A sore that bleeds easily or does not heal
  - > A color change of the oral tissues
  - > A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust, or small eroded area
  - > Pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips
  - > Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving the jaw or tongue
  - > A change in the way the teeth fit together
- Oral cancer most often occurs in those who use tobacco in any form.
- Alcohol use combined with smoking greatly increases risk.
- Prolonged exposure to the sun increases the risk of lip cancer.
- Oral cancers can occur in people who do not smoke and have no other known risk factors.
- Oral cancer is more likely to strike after age 40.
- Studies suggest that a diet high in fruits and vegetables may prevent the development of potentially cancerous lesions.

### Prevention and Detection

- The best way to prevent oral cancer is to avoid tobacco and alcohol use.
- Regular dental check-ups, including an examination of the entire mouth, are essential in the early detection of cancerous and pre-cancerous conditions.
- Many types of abnormal cells can develop in the oral cavity in the form of red or white spots. Some are harmless and benign, some are cancerous and others are pre-cancerous, meaning they can develop into cancer if not detected early and removed.
- Oral cancer is often preceded by the presence of clinically identifiable premalignant lesions. These lesions may present as either white or red patches or spots. Identifying white and red spots that show dysplasia and removing them before they become cancerous is an effective method for reducing the incidence and mortality of cancer.



On average,  
only half  
of those  
diagnosed  
with oral  
cancer will  
survive  
more than  
five years.