

# Facts on Oral Cancer

- Approximately 37,000 people in the US will be newly diagnosed with oral cancer in 2010.
- This is the fifth year in a row in which there has been an increase in the rate of occurrence of oral cancers, in 2007 there was a major jump of over 11% in that single year.
- There are two distinct pathways by which most people come to oral cancer. One is through the use of tobacco and alcohol, a long term historic problem and cause, and the other is through exposure to the HPV-16 virus (human papilloma virus version 16), a newly identified etiology, and the same one which is responsible for the vast majority of cervical cancers in women.
- While some think this is a rare cancer, mouth cancer will be newly diagnosed in about 100 new individuals each day in the US alone, and a person dies from oral cancer every hour of every day.
- The death rate for oral cancer is higher than that of cancers which we hear about routinely such as cervical cancer, Hodgkin's lymphoma, laryngeal cancer, cancer of the testes, and endocrine system cancers such as thyroid, or skin cancer (malignant melanoma).
- When found at early stages of development, oral cancers have an 80 to 90 % survival rate. Unfortunately at this time, the majorities are found as late stage cancers, and this accounts for the very high death rate of about 45% at five years from diagnosis, and high treatment related morbidity in survivors.
- Late stage diagnosis is not occurring because most of these cancers are hard to discover, it is because of a lack of public awareness coupled with the lack of a national program for opportunistic screenings which would yield early discovery by medical and dental professionals.
- Often it is only discovered when the cancer has metastasized to another location, most likely the lymph nodes of the neck. Prognosis at this stage of discovery is significantly worse than when it is caught in a localized intra oral area.
- Oral cancer is particularly dangerous because in its early stages it may not be noticed by the patient, as it can frequently prosper without producing pain or symptoms they might readily recognize, and because it has a high risk of producing second, primary tumors.
- Patients, who survive a first encounter with the disease, have up to a 20 times higher risk of developing a second cancer. This heightened risk factor can last for 5 to 10 years after the first occurrence.
- It is estimated that approximately \$3.2 billion is spent in the United States each year on treatment of head and neck cancers.
- Based on recent revelations in peer reviewed published data in the last few years, that in people under the age of 50, HPV16 may even be replacing tobacco as the primary causative agent in the initiation of the disease process.
- Very recent data (late 2007-2008) lead us to believe that the fastest growing segment of the oral cancer population are non smokers under the age of fifty, which would indicate a paradigm shift in the cause of the disease, and in the locations where it most frequently occurs in the oral environment.
- When you combine tobacco with heavy use of alcohol, your risk is significantly increased, as the two acts synergistically. Those who both smoke and drink, have a 15 times greater risk of developing oral cancer than others.