

Oral Cancer and Dental Care

The Oral Connection

“Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey understands that my dentist can spot serious health risks like oral cancer.”



When it comes to oral cancer, early detection is your best defense.

The death rate for oral cancer is higher than that of cervical cancer, Hodgkins disease, brain cancer, liver cancer, testicular cancer, kidney cancer and skin cancer. This year, 30,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral cancer, and 8,000 will die from the disease; roughly one person every hour of every day. Of those 30,000 newly diagnosed individuals, only half will be alive in five years.

The death rate of oral cancer is so high because it is often diagnosed late in its development, usually when the cancer spreads to another location, typically the lymph nodes of the neck. However, dentists are trained to recognize lesions and other marks that can be early indicators of oral cancer.

Dental exams can detect changes in the mouth that might be premalignant or malignant, which will accelerate the diagnosis and initiate early treatment. Early-stage oral cancer, which is defined as being less than four centimeters in size and without lymph node involvement, is controlled in more than 75 percent of cases.

If you experience any of the above symptoms, contact your dentist and/or physician immediately. Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco, and limit your intake of alcohol, as these substances contribute to the transformation of normal cells to cells that exhibit malignant (cancerous) behavior.

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Some possible indicators of oral cancer may be:

- Mouth sores that bleed easily or do not heal.
- Mouth pains.
- Lumps, soreness or thickening of the mouth, cheek, throat or tongue.
- A white or red patch anywhere inside the mouth that doesn't go away.
- Problems chewing or swallowing food.
- Swelling of the jaw.
- Loosening of the teeth.
- Voice changes.
- Pain in the ears.
- Lump in the neck.

**Be sure to visit your dentist regularly ...
it could improve the quality of your life.**

Sources: www.qualitydentistry.com; The Oral Cancer Foundation, <www.oralcancerfoundation.org>.



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Making Healthcare Work

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