

Common symptoms of mouth cancer.

- 1 A sore or ulcer in the mouth that persists more than three weeks.
- 2 A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth.
- 3 A lump anywhere in the mouth.
- 4 Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable.
- 5 Difficulty in chewing or moving the jaw or tongue.
- 6 Numbness of the tongue or mouth.
- 7 A feeling that something is caught in the throat.
- 8 Difficulty in swallowing.
- 9 A chronic sore throat or voice change (hoarseness) that persists more than six weeks.
- 10 Neck swelling present that persists more than three weeks.
- 11 Unexplained tooth mobility persisting for more than three weeks - *see a dentist urgently.*
- 12 Persistent nasal obstruction/mucus causing difficulty breathing through nose.
- 13 Unexplained earache.

Visit your dentist or doctor at once if you notice any abnormal problems or are not sure.



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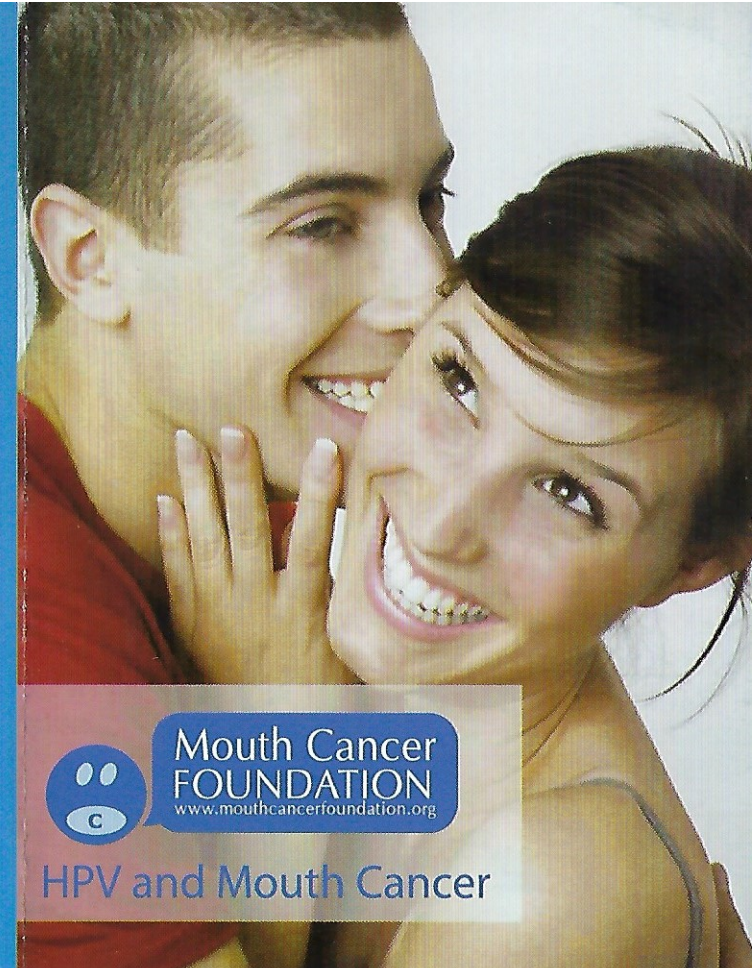


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Mouth Cancer Foundation

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The Mouth Cancer Foundation provides practical advice and support for head and neck cancer patients through its website www.mouthcancerfoundation.org and telephone helpline +44 (0)1924 950 950



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HPV and Mouth Cancer

“ HPV is presenting itself as a new dominant causative factor of mouth cancer. ”

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support for head and neck cancer patients

What is HPV?

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus group. It affects skin and mucosal areas of the body and can be spread by skin contact. Most infections are easily fought off by the body's immune system and cause no symptoms.

The commonest types (HPV-6 and HPV-11) produce the warts often seen on the hands, arms, legs, genitals and other areas of the skin. These are harmless, non-cancerous, and easily treatable. However, some strains cause cancers.

Two types (HPV-16 and HPV-18) affect the genital tract and cause the majority of cervical cancers and some types of cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis and anus, and also in the mouth.

HPV causes 5% of all cancers

HPV and Mouth Cancer

Classically, mouth cancer occurs in smokers and drinkers with poor oral health and usually in people in their 50s or older. But more recently, studies are showing that HPV-16, the same virus associated with cervical cancer, is also linked to cancer in the mouth in younger people with good oral health and no history of either smoking or drinking alcohol.

Studies are showing this new type of mouth cancer has been increasing in the USA and Europe since the 1990s. These HPV cancers are the fastest increasing type of mouth cancers presently. It is not yet clear why.

Fortunately, these HPV mouth cancers appear to be more responsive to treatment and the survival rate is much better than for non-HPV mouth cancer.

HPV mouth cancers tend to appear in the back of the mouth area such as the back of the tongue, back of the throat (oropharynx) and the tonsil area while non-HPV related mouth cancers involve other parts of the mouth. HPV mouth cancers often have a strawberry-like surface appearance.

Getting HPV

A recent analysis found that increased risk was associated with a history of increased number of lifetime sexual and/or oral sex partners, and for men an earlier age at first sexual intercourse. This fits with data for cervical cancer, also caused by HPV, which is more likely in women who become sexually active at an earlier age.

Sexually active adults have a 75 percent chance of acquiring HPV during their lifetimes. You may never know you are infected, as there are no symptoms. Fortunately, HPV infections are successfully fought off by the body's immune system and the infection often resolves without treatment, even infection with high-risk strains of HPV.

However in some people, the infection can persist or reappear. People with persistent HPV-16 oral infection are at much higher risk for oropharynx cancer.

Presently, testing for HPV-16 is not really useful as there is no treatment to clear it.

“ The only currently available preventive measure is to practice sensible sexual behaviour. Be aware of the early signs, as self-awareness is the key to early detection of this disease, when it is most vulnerable to treatment and survival rates are the highest. ”

How to avoid mouth cancer

About half of all cancers can be prevented through healthy living and sensible lifestyle choices.

1. Avoid tobacco use
2. Avoid or limit alcohol use
3. Eat healthy food, in moderation, and maintain a healthful weight
4. Exercise moderately most days
5. Avoid casual sex. Increasing the number of sexual partners or choosing partners with several prior partners increases risk. Preference for oral sex and possibly open-mouth kissing also increase your risk. Reduce your risk by using condoms and barriers during oral sex.

HPV Vaccination

Vaccines that protect against HPV strains linked with cervical, penile warts and anal cancer already being offered to girls and young women to prevent cervical cancer. It is thought that these vaccines will also protect against HPV-related mouth cancer. It is likely that boys will also be vaccinated if the cost-effectiveness of including them in the vaccination programmes is proven. The data suggest very strongly that the vaccine will work in men.

This information leaflet was prepared with the kind assistance of Professor Margaret Stanley, Professor of Epithelial Biology in the University of Cambridge

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