



# HealthyPeople • Dental

## APRIL IS ORAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

When it comes to identifying potential warning signs of oral cancer, dentists are often the first ones to notice any abnormalities. Oral cancer screenings are performed during your normal six month dental checkup, which is just another in the long list of reasons to see your dentist on a regular basis.

### BE MINDFUL OF SYMPTOMS

Your mouth is one of your body's most important early warning systems. Between dental visits, it is important to be aware of the following signs and symptoms, and to see a dental professional if they do not improve or disappear after two to three weeks:

- a sore, or soreness or irritation that doesn't go away
- red or white patches, or pain, tenderness, or numbness in your mouth or lips
- lumps, thickening tissues, rough spots, crusty or eroded areas
- difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving your jaw or tongue
- a change in the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth

When it comes to symptoms, keep this two to three week time period in mind, but always call your dentist right away if you have any immediate concerns.



## FACTORS THAT MAY INCREASE RISK

Research has identified a number of factors that may contribute to the development of oral cancer. Historically, those at an especially high risk of developing oral cancer have been heavy drinkers and smokers older than age 50, but today the cancer also is occurring more frequently in younger, nonsmoking people. The sexually transmitted human papillomavirus 16 (HPV) is related to the increasing incidence of oropharyngeal cancer (most commonly involving tonsillar tissue, including the base of tongue) in that younger population. HPV caused oropharyngeal cancer may present with one or more of the following persistent (longer than two-three weeks) signs and symptoms:

- a painless lump or swelling felt in the neck
- sore throat, difficulty swallowing, or pain when swallowing
- swelling of the tonsillar areas at the back of the mouth

Be aware of the symptoms and risk factors of oral and oropharyngeal cancer. Early detection and treatment may well be the key to a complete recovery.



If you have never had an oral cancer examination, there is no better time to schedule one than during Oral Cancer Awareness Month in April. When you do, be sure to ask that this examination be made a routine part of all of your future dental check-ups.

Source: ADA.org