

ORAL CANCER ALERT

As your dental professional, we're full of good reasons why you should visit the dentist on a regular basis. Preventing decay, maintaining good oral health and making sure your smile is as attractive as possible are all good incentives to visit us at least twice a year, but you probably don't give much thought to another serious reason to have your mouth checked regularly: oral cancer screenings.

According to the Oral Cancer Foundation, oral cancer – which includes mouth cancer, tongue cancer and throat cancer – is a serious worldwide concern, with approximately 37,000 new cases in 2007 diagnosed in North America alone.

You can lower your risk of oral cancer by refraining from tobacco products in any form, avoiding alcohol or drinking only in moderation, and using a lip balm that contains sunscreen to protect your lips from harmful UV rays. Awareness of the telltale signs of the disease is also important, so take a moment to familiarize yourself with these possible signs and symptoms of oral cancer:

- **Any ulcers or sores in the mouth that do not heal. Irritation or swelling of the lip or in the mouth, or a lump in the neck, lip, mouth, gums or tongue that lasts longer than two weeks.**
- **A white or red patch in the gums, tongue or lining of the mouth.**
- **A feeling that something is caught in the throat, or a sore throat that doesn't go away.**
- **Thickening in the cheek.**
- **Bleeding, or pain or numbness in the mouth. Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing.**
- **Loose teeth, or dentures that no longer fit due to swelling in the jaw.**

Oral cancers have an 80 to 90 percent cure rate if the cancer is found early. Unfortunately, the majority of oral cancer cases are discovered as late stage cancers, which accounts for the very high death rate of about 50 percent at five years from diagnosis. When you

apply this statistic to the one provided by the National Cancer Institute, that 1 in 98 people born today will be diagnosed with cancer of the oral cavity and pharynx during their lifetime, you can understand why we so strongly recommend regular dental checkups.

It's easy to dismiss a small lump or irritation in the mouth as a cold sore or a bite to the inside of your cheek. However, knowing now how critical early diagnosis is to long-term survival, if you have any doubts about suspicious spots or sores on your lips, tongue or anywhere in your mouth, please make sure that you call us for an appointment so we can examine it more closely. If we detect anything unusual, we will conduct further testing to ensure that you receive the appropriate care and follow-up.

Good oral care is about much more than just your teeth. If you haven't already made your next dental recare appointment, we encourage you to take care of it today.