



STATE OF MARYLAND

# DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Oral Cancer Highly Preventable** *Oral Cancer Awareness Week June 24 – 30, 2007*

Baltimore, MD (June 20, 2007) – Cancer of the mouth, or oral cancer, will kill more Marylanders this year than either melanoma or cervical cancer, according to recent data from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). Only 50 percent of those diagnosed with the disease will survive five years.

June 24-30 is Oral Cancer Awareness Week, a national recognition week aimed at educating the public about the risk factors, signs and symptoms of the disease.

“Mouth cancer is highly preventable,” said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. “Tobacco use, alcohol use, and sun exposure are all risk factors for mouth cancer. Lifestyle changes that reduce these risk factors offer the best protection from this deadly disease.”

Ninety percent of those diagnosed with mouth cancer use tobacco products, according to Maryland cancer data. “Preventing the use of tobacco products and helping those who currently use them to quit can greatly reduce the number of cases of mouth cancer,” said Sec. Colmers. “Fortunately, tobacco users who need help with quitting can use Maryland’s free telephone quit line, 1-800-QUIT-NOW, to get the support and resources they need to kick the habit.”

Heavy alcohol use is another risk factor for developing mouth cancer. When heavy alcohol use is paired with tobacco use, the risk is even greater. In addition, prolonged sun exposure without the use of lip balm with SPF 15 or higher can increase the risk of lip cancer. People who work outdoors are 30 percent more likely to develop lip cancer than those who work indoors.

While mouth cancer is twice as common in men as in women, African American men suffer from this disease more than any other group. Only one in three African American men diagnosed with mouth cancer will survive for five years or more.

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Early detection of mouth cancer is crucial for increasing the odds of survival after diagnosis. Your dentist, dental hygienist, or physician should provide an exam for mouth cancer on an annual basis. If you are not sure if you have had an exam for mouth cancer, be sure to ask your health care provider at your next visit. Remember, early detection can save smiles and lives.

If you have any of the following signs or symptoms for more than two weeks see your dentist or physician immediately.

- A white or red patch in the mouth
- A sore, irritation, lump or thickening of the mouth
- Hoarseness or feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty moving the tongue or jaw
- Numbness of the tongue or other areas of the mouth
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable

For more information about mouth cancer prevention and programs in your area, call your local health department or visit [www.maryland-oralcancer.org](http://www.maryland-oralcancer.org).

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