



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oral Cancer Is Highly Preventable

Awareness Week runs from June 22-28

BALTIMORE, MD (June 20, 2008) – 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 22-28 is Oral Cancer Awareness Week, a national recognition week aimed at educating the public about the risk factors, signs and symptoms of the disease.

“The good news about mouth cancer is that it is highly preventable,” said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. “This campaign to prevent mouth cancer is further evidence of the strong emphasis the State places on preventing all oral diseases that impact children and adults. As we have begun to see progress in preventing tooth decay in children through the recommendations of our Dental Action Committee, I am confident that we also will see the day in Maryland when adults will be at less risk from dying from mouth cancers.”

Ninety percent of those diagnosed with mouth cancer use tobacco products, according to Maryland cancer data. 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,” said Dr. Harry Goodman, director for the DHMH Office of Oral Health. “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.”

Tobacco users who need help with quitting can get counseling and medication by calling The Maryland Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-QUIT NOW. The program provides phone based counseling and up to a four-week supply of nicotine patches or gum to tobacco users who are age 18 and over and meet basic health requirements. The free program is available to all callers regardless of income or how long they have smoked. The nicotine patches and gum are available only while supplies last and are provided on a first come, first served basis.

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

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Oral Health Week, page two

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.

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 these 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.

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