



You thought **oral cancer** was just an older man's disease? **Not always.**

Oral cancer is rising in women, young people and non-smokers. Testing is now painless. Early detection saves lives.

## Tips on how to detect and prevent oral cancer

By Dr. Joanne Lussier - Centre Dentaire Joanne Lussier Inc.



Dr. Joanne Lussier

ORAL CANCER kills one person every hour of every day. It's a cancer on the rise, with a new form of the disease afflicting women more than ever before. The good news is that a new simple test enables you to seize it before it's too late. It's a test everyone needs to demand from dentists; one cannot afford to miss out on it.

Oral cancer is one of the easiest cancers to spot, diagnose and treat. Yet more than 60% of them are discovered too late. This deadly cancer starts with a sore or growth in the mouth, which does not go away. With early diagnosis, the chance of a cure is an outstanding 80 to 90%. Yet one out of four people diagnosed with oral cancer will die because it has not been diagnosed and treated on time.

The typical oral cancer patient used to be a smoker or heavy drinker and twice as likely to be a man (Ex: Michael Douglas was diagnosed with stage 4 oral cancer last year). The majority of new cases are caused by the human papilloma virus or HPV, the same virus responsible for the vast majority of cervical cancers diagnosed in women.

It's very important for teenagers and adults to be aware that the entire paradigm around oral cancer has completely changed. Your dentist was trained in the past to turn on the radar for oral cancer as soon as you would mention you were a smoker or a daily alcohol user. Unfortunately too many dentists have not necessarily changed their radar alarm. Oral cancer is on the rise with non smokers, non drinkers, and young people. Women are now at greater disposal because the number one cause of new oral cancer is HPV - a sexually transmitted disease. Now 50% of sexually active patients are at risk of developing oral cancer via HPV infection, and the main way of transmission is oral sex.

Some statistics in the United States show that only 15% of the population have had proper oral examination. People have to start to demand

screening tests and the dental community has to get ahead of this to evaluate and detect the first signs of oral cancer. We need to detect earlier before it's too late and the disease spreads into large lesions. The good news is that we now have new technology to detect first signs of oral cancer, but patients have to demand oral cancer screening to their dentist every year, or change to a clinic that offers this specific examination. Dentists are on the first line of defence when it comes to oral cancer detection. Patients and doctors should understand what these lesions are, what to look for. They look very similar to the everyday white and red spots people can get in their mouth. It's our duty as dentists to know what to look for, and to educate the general population.

### Four warning signs or symptoms for oral cancer:

- White or red patches in your mouth or a mouth sore that will not heal could be a cancer sore. Red surrounding, a bit of white texture in the middle, typically this will heal within seven to ten days. If still present after 14 days, the alarm should go off - get it checked.
- A sore throat or ear pain could be caused by a viral infection or a cold, which is very common. Your alarm should go off when symptoms persist more than 14 days and your ear pain is only on one side.
- Lump in the neck, very common of a HPV cancer. It's a metastasis of the tumour from its original sites to a lymph node in the neck.
- Changes in your voice quality or hoarseness. If it persists over six to eight days get it checked. There is a chance that tumours could be on or around the vocal cords, irritating those cords and affecting the voice.

*Are you in need of dental work or a second opinion? Then make the switch to Dr Lussier's state-of-the-art clinic in RDP. They'll give you an honest diagnosis based on your real needs. Their office offers a full range of dental services and a qualified staff devoted to your oral and general health.*

*(Very easily accessible off Highway 25)*

So oral cancer is an easy cancer to spot and diagnose. Yet, why is one out of four patients is dying from it? It's all about early discovery. It's about unhealthy cells, tissues being detected as soon as they get dysfunctional. That is where the newest technology in dental offices comes into play for a painless and effective diagnosis.

### ORAL CANCER screening test Ground breaking new technology

First your dentist should do a routine visual examination of all the soft tissues of the mouth and the neck, under a regular white light. He/she should be looking for any white, red or dark spots in the mouth. This takes only one minute.

Next is the VELSCOPE examination. This is a new technology that gives a visual of abnormal tissues under a special blue light. It highlights cells that have just changed from healthy to unhealthy called dysplastic cells.

Cervical cancer was the leading and first cause of death amongst women until the emergence of the Pap smear test and it's now in 14<sup>th</sup> place. By using VELSCOPE testing and proper oral examination, we have an opportunity to reproduce similar results with oral cancer. Our office is truly prepared and equipped to offer early detection.

### Oral cancer prevention tips:

- Demand an annual visual and, if available, the VELSCOPE screening tests
- Limit alcohol (on daily basis) and tobacco use
- Limit exposure to UV radiation to your lips
- Practice safe sex, otherwise the spread of HPV will rise and consequently so will oral cancer

After following this overview of oral cancer, our policy screening test in our office is recommended for everyone aged 16 years old and older at every dental cleaning - so twice a year - or once per year at the very least. ❖



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