



Dental

Preventing and treating mouth cancer



Cancer of the mouth is called oral cancer. It strikes more than 37,000 people in the United States each year. It often is not discovered until it is more advanced. As a result, there is less than a 50% survival rate five years after diagnosis.*

Oral cancer can strike anyone, but the leading risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Chewing tobacco
- Drinking alcohol
- Contracting the human papillomavirus (HPV). This is a common sexually transmitted disease

New tests detect cancer sooner.

New screening tools may help to find oral cancer sooner. With light contrast screening, it can be detected and treated earlier. The medical term for light contrast screening is “fluorescence visualization.” The test uses light to help your dentist find healthy and unhealthy tissue.

You should know:

- More than 37,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with oral cancer each year.¹
- Risk factors include tobacco and alcohol use.
- New tests help detect oral cancer earlier and are covered by UnitedHealthcare for adult patients.
- Treatment may be more effective when it is started earlier.

There are two light contrast tests:

- One test passes a light over tissue treated with a special solution. Normal tissue absorbs the light and appears dark. Abnormal tissue appears white.
- Another test shines a blue light into the mouth. This shows the deeper tissue layers where pre-cancer changes often start.

A brush biopsy is often done as a follow-up to light contrast. It may also be done if there is suspicious tissue. A dentist uses a brush to take a tissue sample from the suspicious area. The sample is then sent to a lab. If the results are positive, a biopsy is done.

A biopsy involves removing a tissue sample with a scalpel. Then, it is studied in a lab. The results help determine a final diagnosis and a plan of treatment.

New testing procedures are covered.

These tests are often done in addition to traditional manual screening and are covered by UnitedHealthcare for adult patients. Visit your dentist regularly and use your oral cancer screening benefit. Remember, early detection is important.

Mouth cancer warning signs:

- Red and/or white spots in your mouth or on your lips
- Sores in your mouth or on your lip that don't heal
- Changes to the surface of your mouth or lip tissue
- Bleeding in the mouth
- Loose teeth
- Difficulty swallowing
- Ear pain
- Numbness of the tongue or other mouth parts
- Jaw swelling



¹ The Oral Cancer Foundation, <http://oralcancerfoundation.org/facts/index.htm>, last modified 2013.

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