



The Tooth Fairy Times



Public Health Information from The Dental Health Program | Division of Maternal and Child Health | Prince George's County Health Department

Oral Cancer Awareness Week: April 12-18, 2010

In a perfect world, we wouldn't have to deal with diseases like oral cancer.

Unfortunately, we are all susceptible to this serious condition. There are ways you can help lower your risks and keep your mouth healthy. Oral cancer can occur in the mouth, including the lips. Approximately 30,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral cancer this year. One of the dangers of oral cancer is that in its early stages, it can go unnoticed. It can be painless, and little in the way of physical changes may be obvious. The good news, however, is that your dentist or doctor can, in most cases, see or feel the actual cancer while it is still very small or in its earliest stages.

How can you prevent oral cancer?

Tobacco use, in all its forms, is number one on the list of risk factors in individuals over 50 years old. This includes conventional "smokeless" chewing or spit tobacco. Those who both smoke and drink have a 15 times greater risk of developing oral cancers than others. However, oral cancer is occurring more frequently in those individuals under this age and particularly in women. In some cases, women are being found to have oral cancer caused by HPV, or the human papilloma virus (version 16). Different versions of HPV are present in most cases of cervical cancer. Like cervical cancer, in oral cancer cases the virus is transferred through sexual activity.

Know the Symptoms of Oral Cancer

- **White or red patches in your mouth**
- **A mouth sore that won't heal**
- **Unusual bleeding in your mouth**
- **Loose teeth**
- **Problems or pain with swallowing or chewing**
- **A lump in your neck**
- **A change in your voice**
- **Numbness of the tongue or other area of the mouth**

It is important to have any sore or discolored area of your mouth which does not heal within 14 days looked at by a professional. Many of these symptoms may be caused by less serious conditions. Quitting tobacco and alcohol use significantly reduces your risk of developing oral cancer. There are 25% of cases diagnosed with oral cancer that have not exhibited any of the symptoms listed above.

Your dentist plays an important role in early detection of oral cancer. Regular dental check-ups, including an oral cancer screening, are essential in the early detection of cancerous and pre-cancerous conditions. Oral cancer screenings should be included in your annual dental check-up.



This is leukoplakia, a pre-cancerous lesion, of a 22 year old male who has used spit tobacco. If not removed, this lesion will become cancerous.



This is a cancerous lesion of a 45 year old male who has never smoked. This lesion is caused by HPV, which is found in of 70% of most oral tumors.