Further information

For more about mouth cancer visit www.openuptomouthcancer.org

Helplines for people who want to stop smoking:
Quitline (UK) 0800 00 22 00
NHS (England) 0800 169 0 169
NHS (Wales) 0800 085 2219
NHS (Scotland) 0800 84 84 84
NHS (N Ireland) 0800 85 85 85
Asian Quitline 0800 00 22 88

For more about cancer visit our patient information website www.cancerhelp.org.uk click on 'specific cancers' then 'mouth and oropharyngeal cancer'.

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone 0808 8004040.

You can order our full range of leaflets free online at www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets

About Cancer Research UK
Cancer Research UK is the world’s leading charity dedicated to finding out how to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer. If you would like to support our work, please call 020 7121 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

Together we will beat cancer
Mouth cancer facts

Mouth cancer can develop in any part of the mouth including the tongue, gums, tonsils, lining of the mouth, lips and upper part of the throat.

The early signs of mouth cancer can often be seen. When changes are found early, treatment is easier and is more likely to be successful. This leaflet tells you about the changes to look out for and who is most at risk.

Who is most at risk?

Our lifestyle choices have a big effect on our risk of mouth cancer.

The most important causes of mouth cancer are:
• smoking tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, pipes)
• drinking alcohol
• chewing tobacco or betel nut.

Eating a diet which is low in fruit and vegetables can also increase the risk of mouth cancer.

People who use tobacco and drink a lot of alcohol have the highest risk of mouth cancer. Many mouth cancers are caused this way.

Mouth cancer is more common in men than women and is rare in people under 40.

What should I look out for?

Look for the following changes. They may not be painful but you should still see your doctor or dentist if they last longer than three weeks.

The most common signs of mouth cancer are:
• an ulcer or sore in your mouth or on your tongue
• a red or white patch in your mouth
• an unexplained pain in your mouth or ear.

Other signs to look out for are:
• an unexplained lump in your neck
• a sore or painful throat
• a croaky voice or difficulty swallowing.

Lumps and ulcers in the mouth are very common and usually get better on their own. But changes that last longer than three weeks could be serious and should be reported to your doctor or dentist without delay. Early detection saves lives.

Checking your mouth

Sometimes the early signs of mouth cancer do not cause pain or discomfort but they can be seen. So it is important to check your mouth for any of the changes.

From time to time, spend a few moments in front of the mirror looking in your mouth. Check your tongue, gums, lining of your cheeks, lips, under your tongue and the roof of your mouth. But remember your dentist can easily check the parts you cannot see.

Your dentist can help

Dentists have special training to help them identify health problems and are often the first to spot early changes in their patients. As part of a regular examination, dentists check for the early warning signs of mouth cancer. They will refer patients with suspect changes to hospital for further tests.

If you are over 40, smoke, chew tobacco or betel nut or drink alcohol, ask your dentist to check your mouth once a year. It is important to visit the dentist regularly even if you no longer have your own teeth.