

Human papillomavirus lesion identified at the dentist

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Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different strains or types and is the most common sexually transmitted virus. The American Social Health Association (ASHA) reports that 75 percent or more of sexually active Americans will contract HPV sometime in their lives. HPV is most commonly attributed to causing cervical cancer and genital warts, but did you know HPV also causes oral cancer?

According to a study in *General Dentistry*, the clinical, peer-reviewed journal of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), oral HPV can be detected using a very familiar, conventional device that patients may already experience in your mouth during routine procedures. This device is the VELscope. It's the fun wand that emits a bright, indigo blue light. If you've ever had a cavity, your dentist may have used the VELscope to set/harden the material used to fill the cavity.

John C. Comisi, DDS, FAGD, author of the study, discovered that the blue light emitted from the VELscope also detects cancerous oral tissue. The study explains that when emitting a specific wavelength of light into the mouth, oral fluorescence occurs, which in turn causes the tissue to emit its own light (this is called natural fluorescence). The VELscope produces a blue light that excites the oral tissue cells. Healthy cells will fluoresce back and appear green in color, while damaged and unhealthy cells will not fluoresce and thus appear as black or dark maroon areas against the green surrounding tissue.

"Surgery can remove cancerous lesions, but typically if they are found at a late stage, the surgery can be extensive," says Dr. Comisi. "Only early detection can help to minimize the extent of surgery needed to eradicate the disease. The earlier a lesion is detected, the higher the rate of survival," he adds.

The Oral Cancer Foundation says that more than 34,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral or pharyngeal cancer this year. Of those 34,000 newly diagnosed individuals, only half will be alive in 5 years. It will cause over 8,000 deaths—killing roughly 1 person per hour, 24 hours per day. The Oral Cancer Foundation warns that oral cancer is typically hard to diagnose because in early stages, it may not be noticed by the patient. The next time you visit your dentist, ask about oral cancer screening—most people receive one during their regular dental checkup but do not realize it. AGD spokesperson, Eugene Antenucci, DMD, FAGD, says, "Dentists have a unique ability to diagnose disease at an early stage. All dentists are trained to do comprehensive oral screening examinations—each individual practitioner decides on how to implement their training in their practices."

Numerous studies have shown a connection to oral and overall health. That is why it is important to disclose all health related problems to a dentist—including STDs. "Web site educational information also proves helpful in informing and educating patients regarding diseases such as HPV, its mode of transmission, means of prevention, and the need for regular examinations utilizing technologies such as VELscope for early detection," says Dr. Antenucci.

Source: Academy of General Dentistry

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