

# Mouth cancer rates soar over 20 years

25 November 2016

A new Cancer Research UK analysis reveals that rates of mouth (oral) cancer have jumped by 68 per cent in the UK over the last 20 years, today (Friday).

The figures – released during Mouth Cancer Action Month – reveal the cancer is on the rise for men and women, young and old, climbing from eight to 13 cases per 100,000 people over the last two decades.

For men under 50, the rate has jumped by 67 per cent in the last 20 years – going up from around 340 cases to around 640 cases each year.

For men aged 50 and over, rates have increased by 59 per cent climbing from around 2,100 cases to around 4,400 cases annually.

Oral cancer is more common in men, but there have been similar increases women.

In women under 50, oral cancer rates have risen by 71 per cent in the last 20 years, with annual cases climbing from around 160 to around 300.

Rates for women over 50 have also gone up by 71 per cent, with cases increasing from around 1,100 to around 2,200.

Around nine in 10 cases are linked to lifestyle and other [risk factors](#). Smoking is the biggest avoidable risk factor, linked to an estimated 65 per cent of cases. Other risk factors include alcohol, diets low in fruit and vegetables, and infections with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

Oral cancers include cancer of the lips, tongue, mouth (gums and palate), tonsils and the middle part of the throat (oropharynx).

Cancer Research UK - working with the British Dental Association - has developed an oral cancer toolkit to help GPs, dentists, nurses and hygienists spot the disease and refer suspected cases sooner.

Jessica Kirby, Cancer Research UK's senior health information manager, said: "It's worrying that oral cancer has become more common. It's important to get to know your body and what's normal for you, to help spot the disease as early as possible. An ulcer or sore in your mouth or tongue that won't go away, a lump on your lip or in your mouth, a red or red and white patch in your mouth or an unexplained lump in your neck are all things to look out for. Speak to your GP or dentist about any changes that are unusual or don't go away.

"Healthy lifestyles can help reduce the risk of developing the disease in the first place. Not smoking, drinking less alcohol and eating plenty of fruit and vegetables can all help to cut our risk of [mouth cancer](#). HPV vaccination could help protect against oral HPV infections, and it can prevent a range of cancers associated with the HPV virus, so it's a good idea to get the vaccine if you are offered it."

With smoking being the biggest preventable cause of [oral cancer](#), Cancer Research UK is also calling on the public and local councillors to help protect vital Stop Smoking Services. These specialist services are the most successful way for people to quit smoking.

Andrea Fearon, 47 from Newbury, was diagnosed in 2013 with mouth cancer after a routine checkup by her dentist.

Andrea said: "I had thought that most people with mouth cancer are heavy smokers over the age of 50, so I completely shocked when I was diagnosed with the disease. I'm proof that this type of cancer isn't limited to a particular age or sex. I thought seeing the dentist was about looking after your teeth - but it can save your life. It's thanks to my dentist that the mouth cancer was caught early - that's why I feel so lucky to be alive."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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