



2020 Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Fact Sheet

The Head and Neck Cancer Alliance (HNCA)'s mission is to advance prevention, detection, treatment and rehabilitation of oral, head and neck cancer through public awareness, research, advocacy and survivorship. Our approach focuses on prevention; early detection; patient and survivor education and resources; advocacy and research. For more information go to www.headandneck.org.

What is OHANCAW®?

Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week® (OHANCAW®) is a week aimed at raising awareness of oral, head and neck cancer and saving lives. The week is one of a number of events held throughout the year to educate the public, legislators, health professionals, media and other stakeholders on these cancers. This program is coordinated and sponsored by the Head and Neck Cancer Alliance (HNCA) in partnership with more than 300 partners worldwide. The weeklong series of events aims to educate the public about these potentially life-threatening but eminently treatable cancers and to promote prevention, screening and early detection. OHANCAW® is highlighted by the free screenings and related activities held at participating medical centers across the country and around the world. The screenings are quick, painless, and designed to advance early diagnosis, which can lead to better outcomes.

When is OHANCAW®?

The Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week® is in the month of April and this year's 22nd annual OHANCAW® will be held from April 13-19. The primary focus will be directed toward awareness activities occurring during this week, but HNCA is encouraging all supporters to host a free screening or awareness event in 2020, at any time during the year that works best for their group. For more information, go to www.headandneck.org or email eileen@headandneck.org.

Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Facts

Oral, head and neck cancer refers to many types of cancer, including those that arise in mouth, throat, voice box, sinuses, nasal cavity or salivary glands. In 2020, it is estimated that 650,000 people will be affected by head and neck cancer worldwide, with 330,000 deaths. In the United States, 65,000 new diagnoses will be made this year, with 14,600 deaths. Cancers of the oropharynx (tonsil and base of tongue) are increasing in incidence in Europe and North America, particularly in younger nonsmokers, due in large part to infection with human papillomavirus (HPV). Of the cases of head and neck cancer diagnosed in the United States, it is estimated that nearly 60% will be attributed to HPV infection. In Europe and Asia, head and neck cancer cases attributable to HPV are estimated to be 31% and 17.5 %, respectively.

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Signs and Symptoms

Most oral cancers arise on the lips, tongue or the floor of the mouth. They also may occur inside your cheeks, on your gums or on the roof of your mouth. Oropharyngeal cancers related to HPV are often found in the tonsil or base of tongue. Other head and neck cancers arise from the voice box or throat, or from salivary (spit) glands.

Some early signs and symptoms include:

- A red or white spot in your mouth that doesn't heal or that increases in size
- Sore throat or swollen tonsil
- Changes in your voice
- A lump in your neck
- Earache
- Difficulty swallowing

Risk Factors

Tobacco (including smokeless tobacco) and alcohol use are very strong risk factors for oral, head and neck cancer, particularly those of the tongue, mouth, throat and voice box. People who use both tobacco and alcohol are at greater risk for developing these cancers than people who use either tobacco or alcohol alone. (Source: National Cancer Institute).

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Throat Cancer

Researchers have correlated the rising incidence of head and neck cancer, particularly throat cancer, in young adults (a group traditionally at low risk) to the human papillomavirus (HPV), a potentially cancer-causing virus that can be transmitted through oral sex. Many studies support that oropharyngeal cancers – those affecting the tonsils, back of the mouth (throat) and base of the tongue – have been on the rise since the mid-1980s, and currently 50-70 percent of these cases are caused by HPV infections. In 2018, HPV-related throat cancer surpassed cervical cancer as the most common HPV-related cancer in the U.S.