

Media Release  
July 2011

## DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR MOUTH?

Every day, at least three Australians are being diagnosed with oral cancer. Survival rates for oral cancer remain low despite advances in treatment, and this can be attributed to late detection. Recognising the risk factors and signs of oral cancer is vital to better prognosis and outcomes, and the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has launched a campaign to increase awareness of the risk factors and symptoms of oral cancer.

Smoking, alcohol, poor diet, sun exposure and the human papilloma virus all contribute to a person's risk for oral cancer.

During Dental Health Week (1-7 August), the ADA will be raising awareness about oral cancer, the risk factors that contribute to it and lifestyle changes that can help reduce a person's risk of getting oral cancer.

Chairman of the ADA's Oral Health Committee, Dr Peter Alldritt, says rates of oral cancers are increasing.

"Early detection of oral cancer can save lives, so it's important to know what you should be looking out for in your mouth.

"The ADA has created fact sheets and a website to provide information on what to look for in your mouth, as well as the risk factors that can contribute to oral cancer. The Association is also encouraging people to have a conversation with their dentist about the health of their mouth and their teeth," says Dr Alldritt.

Checking for signs of oral cancer is a part of the regular check-up procedure carried out by your dentist. A dentist is able to assess your mouth thoroughly for abnormalities, so it's vital to visit your dentist regularly.

### **Risk factors for oral cancer:**

- Traditionally men have been at greater risk of oral cancer than women. Smoking and alcohol are major contributing factors. More than 80% of oral cancers in Australia occur in people who smoke.<sup>i</sup> Additionally, regular heavy drinking, defined as more than four standard drinks on a single occasion<sup>ii</sup>, increases your risk of mouth cancers
- Extended sun exposure, without the protection of sunscreen, can cause skin cancer. Skin cancer can appear on parts of the body that are most exposed to the sun, such as your lips

- Consuming a diet low in or with no vegetables increases your risk of oral cancer. Research has shown eating a minimum of eight serves of vegetables per week, compared to three or less, decreases the chance of mouth cancer by 50%<sup>iii</sup>
- Younger people, non smokers and light alcohol consumers are also at risk of oral cancers. A major risk factor in these cases appears to be the human papilloma virus, the virus known to cause genital warts and cervical cancer

Research suggests that the human papilloma virus transferred from the genital area to the mouth can increase the risk of oral cancer. Researchers hope that the cervical cancer vaccine may also reduce the number of oral cancers caused by the human papilloma virus.

For more information on oral cancers and looking after your mouth, visit [www.dentalhealthweek.com.au](http://www.dentalhealthweek.com.au)

---

**For more information on the ADA's Dental Health Week campaign, or to speak with an ADA spokesperson, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:**

Sarah Pinch  
Phone: 03 9289 9555  
Mobile: 0402 414 067  
Email: [spinch@porternovelli.com.au](mailto:spinch@porternovelli.com.au)

Jakob Hesketh  
Phone: 03 9289 9555  
Mobile: 0416 938 360  
Email: [jhesketh@porternovelli.com.au](mailto:jhesketh@porternovelli.com.au)

---

<sup>i</sup> S. Kleid, J. Frowen, *Mouth, nose & throat cancers*, Cancer Council Victoria Thursday 22 November 2007, [http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/cancer\\_types/mouth\\_nose\\_and\\_throat\\_cancers](http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/cancer_types/mouth_nose_and_throat_cancers)

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol, NHMRC, 2009

<sup>iii</sup> *Eur J Cancer Prev* 2003;12(1):49-56