

Dentists play key role in detecting oral cancer

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Ask for screening as part of your general checkup, experts say.

(HealthDay) -- Not only do regular dental exams help keep your teeth and gums healthy, they can help detect oral cancer, the Academy of General Dentistry says.

As part of Oral Cancer Awareness Month in April, the group recommends that people get a dental exam from a general dentist every six months.

"The next time you visit your dentist, ask about an oral cancer screening," academy spokesperson Dr. Seung-Hee Rhee advised in an academy news release.

"Your dentist will feel for lumps or irregular tissue changes in your neck, head, cheeks, and [oral cavity](#) and thoroughly examine the [soft tissues](#) in your mouth, specifically looking for any sores or discolored tissues. Although you may have already been receiving this screening from your dentist, it's a good idea to confirm that this screening is a part, and will remain a part, of your regular exam," Rhee said.

Each year in the United States, more than 30,000 new cases of oral cancer are diagnosed, and more than 8,000 people die of the disease, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The five-year survival rate for oral cancer is about

50 percent.

"If it is not diagnosed and treated in its early stages, oral cancer can be deadly," Rhee said. "Treatment for advanced stage oral cancer may lead to chronic pain, loss of function, permanent facial and oral disfigurement following surgery. The earlier the cancer is detected and treated, the better the outcome."

Possible [warning signs](#) of oral cancer may include: bleeding sores; sores that do not heal; lumps or thick, hard spots; soreness or feeling that something is caught in the throat; difficulty chewing or swallowing; ear pain; difficulty moving the jaw or tongue; [hoarseness](#); numbness of the tongue, and changes in the way teeth fit together.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more about [oral cancer](#).

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