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Oral Cancer

Every hour one American dies of oral cancer. Every year, the disease affects an estimated thirty thousand people and claims nearly eight thousand lives. According to the most recent Surgeon General's Report on oral health, oral cancer is the 6th most common cancer in U.S. males.

The mortality or survivability rate of oral cancer has not changed over the past several decades and one out of six people diagnosed with oral cancer was female. Today, the statistic is a startling one out of three people. The increase of oral cancer among women may be the result of more women smoking in the past thirty years. While those at risk of cancer are typically males over the age of 40 with a history of alcohol and tobacco use. Doctors are now seeing an increase in women and younger people than those traditionally considered to be low risk. The statistics show that 50% of oral cancer sufferers will die from the cancer within 5 years.

Thanks to a new procedure available to dental patients known as brush biopsy, a surface sample of the questionable sore or lesion can be taken without local anesthesia or discomfort. If the result of the biopsy shows the presence of abnormal cells, a larger and more conclusive sample of the tissue may be warranted or the area in question may be removed altogether.

Like all cancers, the earlier you find oral cancer, the easier it is to treat. If you notice a lesion in your mouth and it has not gone away or is resolving itself within a two week period, it is a good idea to have it looked at by a dental professional. Also, some early signs to look for are:

- A sore that bleeds easily or does not heal.
- A color change of the oral tissue.
- A lump, thickening rough spot, crust, or eroded area.
- Pain, tenderness, or numbness in the mouth.
- Difficulty swallowing, chewing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue.
- A change in the way the teeth fit together.