

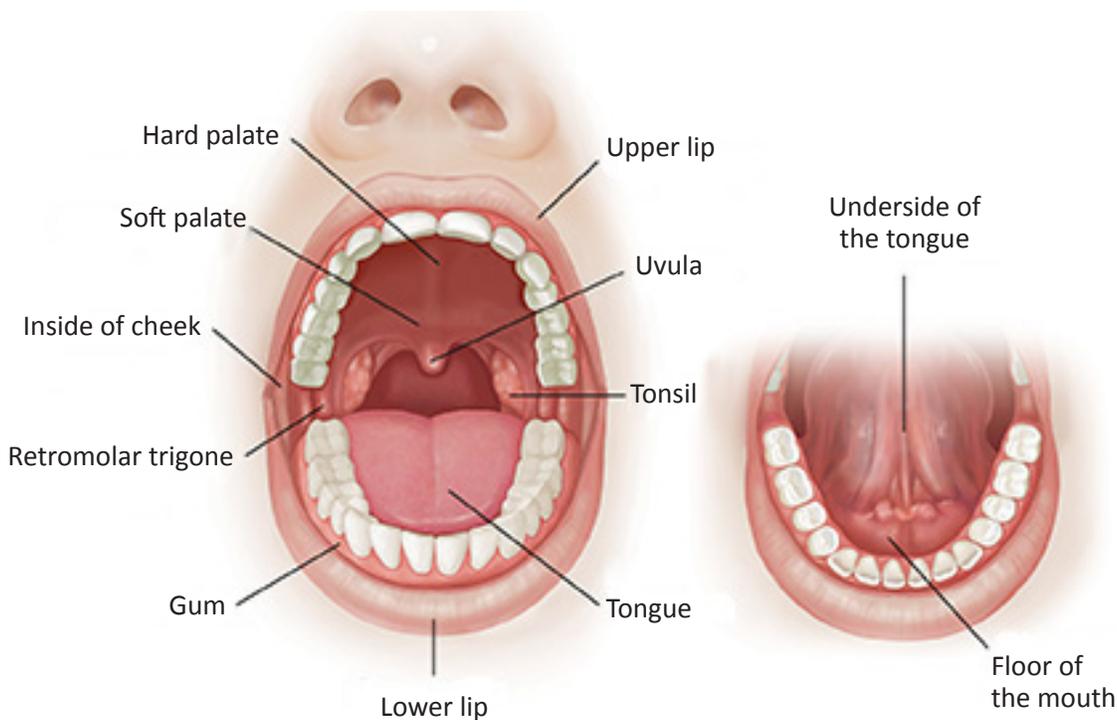
Oral Cancer

What is oral cancer?

The oral cavity (mouth) includes the following:

- Tongue
- Floor of mouth
- Buccal mucosa (inner lining of the cheek)
- Hard palate and soft palate (roof of the mouth)
- Retromolar trigone (the area between the back parts of the upper and lower gums)
- Upper and lower gingiva (gums)

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or physician.



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Oral cancer is cancer that arises anywhere in the mouth. This can appear as an ulcer (sore) or a growth. Cancer of the lip may also be considered oral cancer.

All oral cavity cancers have a tendency to metastasize (spread) to the lymph nodes of the neck. Generally, spreading outside the head and neck is uncommon unless the cancer is quite advanced.

What causes oral cancer?

Oral cancer is more common in men and in older people. However, it can occur in men and women of any age group. Common risk factors of oral cancer include:

- Tobacco use
- Heavy alcohol use
- Poor oral hygiene
- Ill-fitting dentures
- Poor nutrition

Lichen planus, a disease of the oral mucous lining, can also lead to the development of oral cancer. Long-term use of immunosuppressive medications is also a risk factor.

Cancer of the lip is most commonly caused by being exposed to sunlight for long periods.

What are the symptoms?

Some of the common symptoms of oral cancer include:

- An ulcer that fails to heal on its own within a week
- A growth that rises above the surface
- Difficulty chewing due to pain
- Loose teeth
- A lump in the neck

A white patch (leukoplakia) or a red patch (erythroplakia) in the mucous lining of the mouth indicates damage to the surface tissue (dysplasia). These patches must be checked on a regular basis since they are at risk of developing into cancer.

How is oral cancer diagnosed?

An evaluation by a head and neck surgeon is needed to accurately outline the extent of the cancer.

A biopsy is a procedure in which a small piece of tissue is removed from the ulcer or growth in the mouth to check for cancer. This can be done in the office if the area in the mouth is easy to access. If not, a procedure under general anesthesia in the operating room may be necessary.

Imaging studies including a CT scan and a PET scan may be ordered to obtain a clearer picture of the tumor size and location. The scans will also look for any spread of disease into the lymph nodes, lungs or bones.

Resources:

www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html

For more information, please contact:

Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Galter Pavilion, 675 North Saint Clair Street
Suite 15-200
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: 312.695.8182
Fax: 312.695.6298

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic