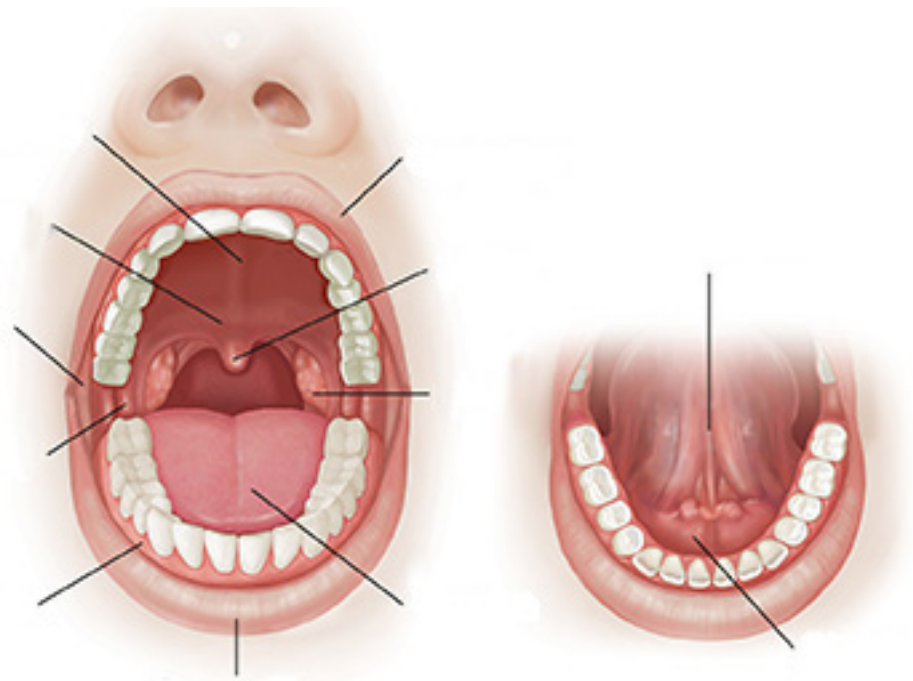


Oral Cancer

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.



©2018 Krames Staywell LLC

Oral cancer is cancer that occurs anywhere in the mouth. It appears as an ulcer (sore) or a growth. Cancer of the lip is another type of oral cancer.

All oral cancers can metastasize (spread) to the lymph nodes of the neck. Spreading outside the head and neck is not common unless the cancer is quite advanced.

Causes of oral cancer

Oral cancer is more common in men and in older people. But it can occur in anyone at any age.

You have a higher risk of getting oral cancer if you:

- Use tobacco
- Drink alcohol often
- Have poor oral hygiene
- Have dentures that do not fit well (too big or too small)
- Have a poor diet
- Have lichen planus, a disease of the oral mucous lining
- Have a long history of using medications to suppress your immune system

Exposure to sunlight for long periods can cause cancer of the lip.

Symptoms

Some common symptoms of oral cancer include:

- An ulcer that will not heal on its own within a week
- A growth that rises above the surface
- Trouble chewing due to pain
- Loose teeth
- A lump in the neck

You might develop patches in your mouth. A white patch (leukoplakia) or a red patch (erythroplakia) in the mucous lining of the mouth means damage to the surface tissue (dysplasia). These patches can develop into cancer. If you have these patches, you should have regular visits with your physician.

Diagnosing oral cancer

If your physician thinks you may have oral cancer, you will need to see a head and neck surgeon. They will examine you.

To confirm a cancer diagnosis, your surgeon will perform a biopsy. That means the surgeon will remove a small piece of tissue from the ulcer or growth in the mouth to check for cancer. The surgeon can do this in the office if the area in the mouth is easy to access. If the tumor is not easy to access, they will do this under general anesthesia in the operating room.

The surgeon will order imaging studies including a CT scan and a PET scan to see a clearer picture of the tumor size and location. The scans also show if the cancer has spread into the lymph nodes, lungs or bones.

Resources

[cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html](https://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 (TTY: 711)

Fax: 312.695.6298