

# Routine dental exams help in the early detection of oral cancer

According to the Oral Cancer Foundation, someone in the United States is diagnosed with oral cancer every 20 minutes. And every hour, someone dies from the disease. Most people diagnosed with oral cancer are over the age of 40 and use tobacco, but oral cancer can strike at *any* age - whether you use tobacco or not.

Your regular exam is a good time for your dentist to check your entire mouth for signs of cancer. An oral cancer exam is totally painless. Basically, your dentist will look for any suspicious spots in and around your mouth - the roof of your mouth, the insides of your cheeks, and the underside of your tongue. This simple screening is an important step in protecting your oral and overall health. While most dentists include this screening with every routine exam, we encourage you to make sure your dentist gives you an oral cancer exam during your next visit.

## What if there's a spot?

In about 10% of patients, the dentist may notice a flat, painless, white or red spot or a small sore. Although most of those spots are harmless, some are not. Harmful oral spots or sores often look the same as those that are harmless, but testing can tell them apart.<sup>2</sup> To make sure that a spot or sore is not dangerous, your dentist may recommend a simple test such as a brush biopsy.

### Symptoms and Signs to Look For<sup>2,3</sup>

- Patches inside the mouth or on the lips that are red, white, or a mixture of red and white
- Sore on the lip or in the mouth that won't heal
- Lump on the neck
- Unexplained earache
- Pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue

During this painless procedure, also called a BrushTest<sup>®</sup>, the dentist will use a small brush to scrape some of the unusual cells. A laboratory then tests the sample to find out whether any cells are pre-cancerous or cancerous. You don't need anesthesia for this non-invasive procedure, and results may help determine the need for a surgical biopsy or other follow-up.

### Early Detection is Key!

To help catch oral cancer in its early stages, we cover the brush biopsy screening procedure on most of our CIGNA Dental plans. Check your plan materials for details.

### Oral Cancer Facts<sup>1</sup>

- Approximately 34,000 people in the United States are diagnosed with oral cancer each year
- More than 8,000 people in the United States die from oral cancer annually
- When detected late, oral cancer five-year survival rate is about 50%

### Learn more: take the CIGNA Dental Oral Cancer Awareness Quiz!

Find it online with other dental health resources at [cigna.com](http://cigna.com), [myCIGNA.com](http://myCIGNA.com) & [itstimetofeelbetter.com](http://itstimetofeelbetter.com)

**Ask your dentist for an oral cancer exam at your next visit  
and every time you return for a dental check-up.**

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<sup>3</sup>National Cancer Institute, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov), October 2005 \* "CIGNA Dental" refers to the following operating subsidiaries of CIGNA Corporation: Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, and CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. and its operating subsidiaries and affiliates. The CIGNA Dental Care<sup>®</sup> plan is provided by CIGNA Dental Health Plan of Arizona, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of California, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Colorado, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Delaware, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Florida, Inc., a Prepaid Limited Health Services Organization licensed under Chapter 636, Florida Statutes, CIGNA Dental Health of Kansas, Inc. (Kansas and Nebraska), CIGNA Dental Health of Kentucky, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Maryland, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Missouri, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of New Jersey, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of North Carolina, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Ohio, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Pennsylvania, Inc., CIGNA Dental Health of Texas, Inc., and CIGNA Dental Health of Virginia, Inc. In other states, the CIGNA Dental Care plan is underwritten by Connecticut General Life Insurance Company or CIGNA HealthCare of Connecticut, Inc. and administered by CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. The term "DHMO" is used to refer to product designs that may differ by state of residence of enrollee, including but not limited to, prepaid plans, managed care plans, and plans with open access features. The CIGNA Dental PPO is underwritten and/or administered by Connecticut General Life Insurance Company with network management services provided by CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. For Arizona/Louisiana residents the dental PPO plan is known as CG Dental PPO. In Texas, CIGNA Dental's network-based indemnity plan is known as CIGNA Dental Choice. 595850c 01/10 ©2010 CIGNA

