



Mouth and Throat Cancers

Campaign Toolkit 2025

Introduction

This communications toolkit provides content and ideas to support general practices in Wessex to:

- raise awareness of mouth and throat cancer symptoms
- encourage people to check their mouths regularly
- support people to seek help if they notice something unusual for them.



Target Audience

Anyone can get mouth or throat cancer but there are some factors that increase risk and you may wish to use this information to target campaign messages:

- Men are twice as likely to develop a mouth or throat cancer than women
- Risk increases with age, 78% of cases occur in people over 55 years old
- Smoking increases your risk of developing mouth cancer by up to ten times compared with non-smokers
- Heavy alcohol consumption is linked to just under a third of all mouth cancers, and combined with smoking can increase the risk even further.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

The profile of people who get mouth and throat cancers is changing.

HPV, an infection transmitted by sexual contact, is the fastest growing cause of mouth and throat cancer and is particularly linked to cancer of the tonsils and tongue. HPV related cancers are rising among younger, healthier non-smoking adults.

See Page 8 for more details and support related to HPV.



Key campaign messages

Here are some key messages we want people to know about the campaign. You will also see some supporting messages you can use as appropriate.

Key Message 1: Knowing the signs of mouth and throat cancers could save your life. See your dentist or GP if you notice any changes in your mouth or throat that don't get better within three weeks.

Supporting messages: Early detection transforms the chances of beating mouth and throat cancers from 50 to 90 per cent.

A mouth ulcer that does not heal, red or white patches in the mouth, unusual lumps or swelling in your mouth or neck, difficulty swallowing or chewing and persistent throat or ear pain are all potential signs of mouth or throat cancer.

Key Message 2: You can check your mouth for any changes and possible signs of mouth cancer. It is easy and can be done in less than two minutes.

Supporting messages: You can perform a self-check using a mirror and clean fingers, examining your face, neck, lips, gums, tongue, and the roof of your mouth. Any changes that don't heal within three weeks should be reported to your GP or dentist.

For a step-by-step guide and video see [Mouth Cancer Self - Check Guide - Mouth Cancer Foundation](#)

Website Copy

Short copy (also for Bulletins and Newsletters):

Wessex Cancer Alliance are raising awareness of mouth and throat cancers this month and encouraging people to 'open wide' and check for symptoms. With less than 20% of people able to name a symptom of mouth and throat cancers, this latest campaign aims to improve awareness of the key signs to look out for.

Visit the campaign webpage today for all the facts and guidance.

<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>



Long copy:

Wessex Cancer Alliance are raising awareness of mouth and throat cancers this month and encouraging people to 'open wide' and check for symptoms. Incidence of mouth and throat cancers have almost doubled in the last ten years and fewer people are having regular check-ups with a dentist.

With less than 20% of people able to name a symptom of mouth and throat cancers, the campaign aims to improve awareness of the key signs to look out for.

Mouth cancer

- **an ulcer which doesn't heal**
- **red and white patches in the mouth**
- **unusual lumps or swellings in the mouth**

Throat Cancer

- **difficulty swallowing or chewing**
- **a persistent sore throat or ear pain**
- **an unexplained lump in your neck**
- **hoarseness or other changes to the voice**

Please contact your GP surgery or dentist if you experience any of these symptoms for three weeks or more.

The Mouth Cancer Foundation have a useful self-examination guide on their website:

<https://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org/self-examination/>

Visit the Cancer Matters Wessex webpage today for more information, support and tips about how you can reduce your risk of mouth and throat cancers:

<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>.



Suggested social media posts or text messages

Below are some suggested words to use for the campaign that you can send via the NHS App, on your social media channels or as a text message to the target audience.

- Knowing the signs of mouth and throat cancer could save your life. See your doctor or dentist if you notice any changes that last for more than 3 weeks
<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- Do you know the signs of mouth cancer? Visit Cancer Matters Wessex and get ready to 'open wide' for your 2 minute check
<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- Do you know the signs of throat cancer? A quick check could save your life. Visit Cancer Matters Wessex for more information
<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- 1 in 88 men will be diagnosed with a mouth or throat cancer in their lifetime and cases are rising. Know the Signs and speak to your GP or Dentist if you are concerned. <https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- The HPV vaccine can protect you from developing mouth or throat cancers. The vaccine is offered to boys and girls from age 12-13 and can be given up until their 25th birthday. Find out more today: <https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/hpv-vaccine/>
- We are supporting Wessex Cancer Alliance with their mouth and throat cancer campaign. Are you ready to 'open wide' and check for symptoms? Know the signs and take action. <https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- Smoking is one of the biggest causes of mouth and throat cancer. If you would like help to stop smoking and reduce your risk, please speak to your local stop smoking service [insert details of local smoking cessation team here]



Campaign Imagery and Assets

Posters – Symptom awareness posters for both mouth and throat cancers will be posted to each GP practice in early November. Electronic versions can be downloaded here:

[Download Poster 1](#)

[Download Poster 2](#)

Additional mouth cancer awareness resources are available to order or download from:

- Oral Health Foundation [Mouth Cancer](#)
- Mouth Cancer Foundation [Education Resources on Mouth Cancer | Prevention & Support](#)



Consider creating a display to catch people's attention. Find some hints and tips here [Creating a display for Mouth Cancer Action Month | Oral Health Foundation](#)

Images – Please see below, a series of images that can be used for social media and websites.



Symptoms of throat cancer include persistent ear pain, a hoarse voice, an unexplained lump in the neck, or pain when swallowing



Smoking is the biggest cause of both mouth and throat cancers



Mouth and Throat Cancer Awareness

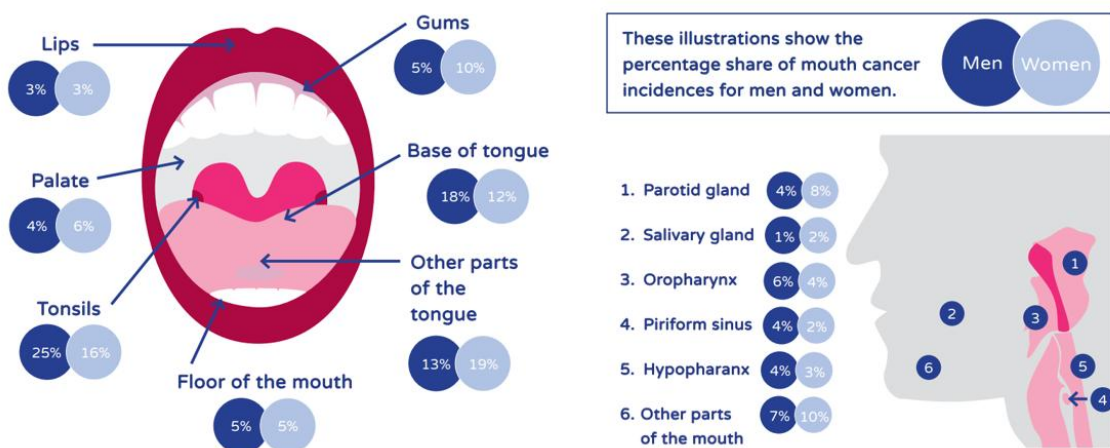
Symptoms for 3+ weeks?
Contact your GP surgery

Early diagnosis saves lives

Further information

Background and definitions

Where mouth and throat cancers appear



Mouth cancer

The medical term for the mouth is the oral cavity. Mouth cancer can start anywhere in the oral cavity. This includes the:

- lips



- inside lining of the cheeks and lips (buccal mucosa)
- front two thirds of the tongue
- gums (gingiva)
- floor of the mouth
- roof of the mouth (hard palate)
- area behind the wisdom teeth (retromolar trigone)

Throat Cancer

The medical term for the throat is the pharynx. The oropharynx is the part of the throat just behind the mouth. Cancer starting in this area is called oropharyngeal cancer.

The oropharynx includes the:

- back one third of the tongue
- soft area at the back of the roof of the mouth (soft palate)
- tonsils and 2 ridges of tissue in front of and behind the tonsils (tonsillar pillars)
- back wall of the throat

Statistics

Mouth and throat cancers are often grouped with other Head and Neck cancers.

Statistics quoted here are from The Mouth Cancer Foundation¹ and CRUK²

- Oral cancer is more common in men than women.
- Research shows that 1 in 55 men and 1 in 108 women will be diagnosed with oral cancer at some point in their life.
- Each year, around 8,900 new cases of mouth and oropharyngeal cancer are diagnosed in the UK.
- Smoking is the main cause of oral cancer.
- Alcohol can increase the risk of oral cancer.
- Drinking and smoking together, can make mouth cancer up to 30 times more likely to develop.
- More than half (53%) of all mouth cancers are diagnosed in stage IV, where the cancer is at its most advanced.

¹ <https://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org/mouth-cancer-facts-and-figures/>

² <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/head-and-neck-cancers>



Survival

- The ten-year survival rate for mouth cancer is between 18% and 57%, depending on where the cancer strikes and how early it is diagnosed.
- The number of people losing their life to mouth cancer in the UK has increased by 46% in the last 10 years.
- Awareness of the major signs and symptoms for mouth cancer are as low as 20%
- 46-88% of mouth and throat cancers in the UK are preventable.

How to reduce your risk of mouth and throat cancers?

Lifestyle and diet

- **Avoid tobacco:** Quit smoking, chewing tobacco, or using betel nut, as tobacco is the biggest risk factor for both mouth and throat cancers.
- **Limit alcohol:** Drink alcohol in moderation. Heavy drinking, especially combined with tobacco use, significantly increases your risk. **Drinking and smoking together can make mouth cancer 30 times more likely.**
- **Eat a healthy diet:** Consume a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, as these foods contain antioxidants that may help protect the body.
- **Protect your lips from the sun:** Use a lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher and wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect your lips from UV radiation, especially if you spend a lot of time outdoors.



Regular dental check-ups and the HPV vaccination also play an important role in prevention and early detection of mouth and throat cancers.

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

HPV can be transmitted through skin to skin contact, including oral sex. It is predicted to **overtake tobacco and alcohol as the main risk factor for mouth cancer** within the next decade [MCF].

In England, girls and boys aged 12 to 13 years are routinely offered the HPV vaccination when they're in school Year 8. The vaccine significantly lowers the risk of mouth and throat cancers, and has been shown to reduce cervical cancer rates by up to 90%.

This year's GP led immunisation catch up campaign is focusing on the HPV vaccination for those who missed it at school. For support with this campaign, see the WCA toolkit here: [Improving HPV vaccine uptake - Welcome to Wessex Cancer Alliance](#)

Patient information about the HPV vaccination is available here:

<https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/hpv-vaccine/>



Useful links:

Campaign:

- Cancer Matters Wessex dedicated Mouth and Throat Cancers Campaign webpage: <https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/mouth-and-throat-cancers/>
- Dental Health – Mouth Cancer Action Month: <https://www.dentalhealth.org/mouthcancer>
- Mouth Cancer Foundation: <https://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org/>

Patient information:

- Mouth cancer – NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mouth-cancer/>
- Self-check guide: <https://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org/self-examination/>
- Cancer Research UK – Mouth Cancer: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/mouth-cancer/about> and Throat Cancer: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/head-neck-cancer/throat>
- Macmillan Cancer Support: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/head-and-neck-cancer/mouth-cancer>

Learning disabilities:

- Mouth cancer Easy Read: <https://www.macintyrecharity.org/download/file/6380/>
- Learning Disabilities and Oral care: <https://www.dentalhealth.org/learning-disabilities-and-oral-care>

Dental services:

- Hampshire & Isle of Wight ICB [Dentistry - Additional hours scheme :: NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)
- Dorset ICB [Dental services – NHS Dorset](#)
- Dentaaid: <https://www.dentaaid.org/>