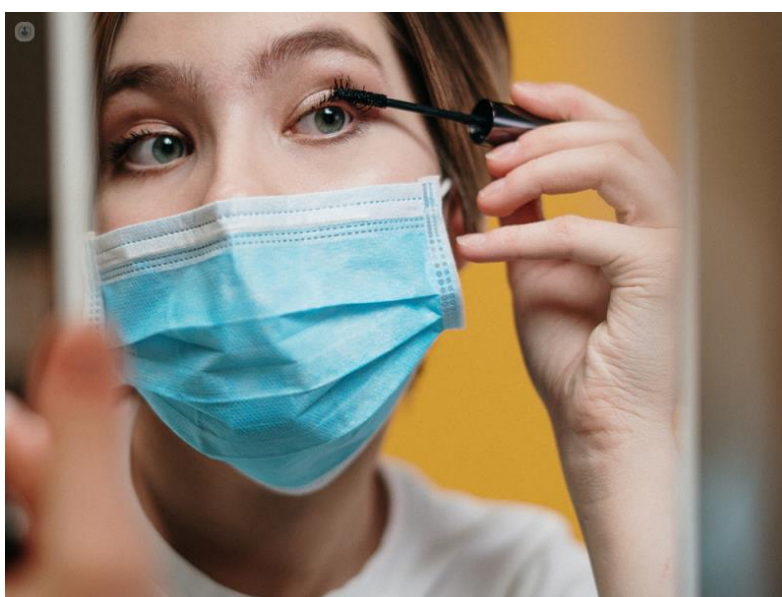


Don't let COVID-19 mask mouth cancer

Written by: [PROFESSOR ANDREW EDER](#)

We are most certainly living in unprecedented times and many will have read in the national press about medical conditions being left undiagnosed or treatments being delayed as a direct result of COVID-19.

This is especially true of mouth cancers and it is therefore entirely appropriate that we support **Mouth Cancer Awareness** with the latest campaign being promoted again by the highly regarded Oral Health Foundation.



In this article, [Professor Andrew Eder](#), a leading specialist in restorative dentistry and prosthodontics in Central London, explains the importance of continuing with your regular check-ups at the dentist and what treatment can be offered if, on the rare chance, mouth cancer is discovered.

How common is mouth cancer?

According to Oral Health Foundation, 8,722 people in the UK were diagnosed with [mouth cancer](#) over the past year. This is the equivalent to someone being diagnosed every hour of every day. This puts mouth cancer as the fifteenth most common cancer in the UK with the majority of these cancers being associated with the lips, tongue or soft tissues inside the mouth. Two-thirds of all new cases are seen in men with over three quarters being in those over the age of 55.

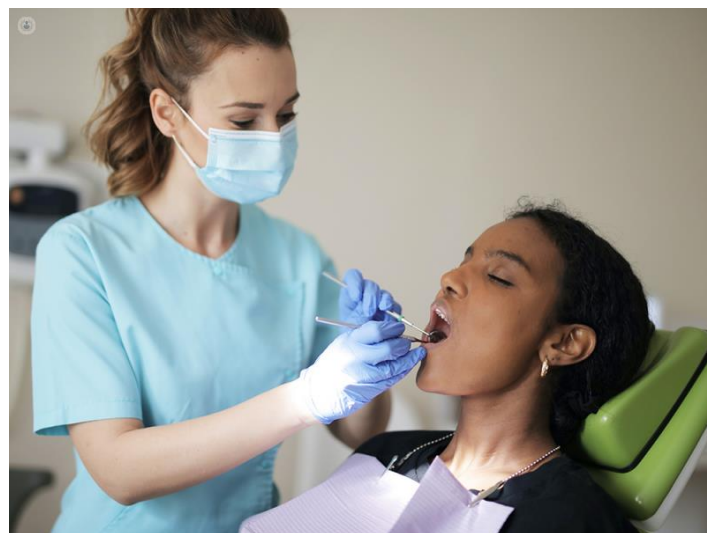
What causes mouth cancer?

Interestingly, lifestyle factors are key to the development of mouth cancers with long-term tobacco use and high levels of alcohol consumption being amongst the most likely causes. Alongside this, there is a strong research focus on the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus as being another major causative factor.

Some also make reference to a poor diet or rough teeth being linked to mouth cancers but the evidence is weaker and genetics or a suppressed immune system may have a stronger role.

Mouth cancer check

In contrast to so many other medical conditions, we tend to approach our doctors with a problem and ask for their opinion or advice. The same may be true for mouth cancers where we are aware of a change in our mouth and we consult our doctor or dentist. However, it can be so very different for most mouth cancers in that we may not be aware of a change but still see our dentist for a check-up every 6-12 months. A key feature of this regular check-up is that it should also include a **mouth cancer check**.



How is mouth cancer checked by a dentist?

As part of a **regular dental check-up**, and having looked at your teeth, any restorations and your gums to check that all is fine, your dentist may then turn their attention to checking your lips, tongue and all the soft tissues inside your mouth.

They will check for any changes such as:

- an ulcer that has not healed
- a new lump
- swelling
- a red or white patch

Should such a problem be identified, this might be reviewed for a few days or referral to a specialist colleague may be suggested for a further assessment and possible imaging. Sometimes, even a biopsy is performed to take a more detailed look at the soft tissues.

How can mouth cancer be treated?

More often than not, it is absolutely nothing and all heals well. However, on the rare occasion where a problem is identified, the earlier a diagnosis is made the better. Subsequent treatment might involve several specialists in different fields and one or more of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery may be required. If any teeth are involved and need to be removed, these may need to be replaced to re-establish one's smiling and the ability to chew.

Take-home message

The take-home message from this article is a really strong but reassuring one: visit your dentist **regularly**, it is about so much more than just your teeth and gums - and with an early mouth cancer diagnosis, treatment can be very effective with little in the way of long-term health problems.

To put things into perspective, over thirty years in clinical practice, I have identified three such mouth cancers early at a routine check-up and all three patients are doing absolutely fine many years on. Your dentist and your dental practice are safe - do not let Covid-19 interfere with your health and well-being!

Be Mouth Aware (with kind permission of the Oral Health Foundation)

- As mouth cancer can affect the lips, tongue or soft tissues inside the mouth, we all must know what to look out for.
- Early detection could save your life. If you notice any changes in your mouth, please **speak to your dentist or doctor immediately**.

Making contact - please contact [Professor Andrew Eder](#) for more information.