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Oral Cancer is Highly Preventable
Oral Cancer Awareness Week June 21-27, 2009

YOURTOWN, MD (June XX, 2009) – About 600 Marylanders will be diagnosed with oral cancer this year—and only half of them will be alive five years later, according to recent data from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

June 21-27 is Oral Cancer Awareness Week in Maryland. This week is aimed at educating the public about the risk factors, signs and symptoms of the disease.

“The survival rate for oral cancer, unlike most other cancers, hasn’t improved much over the past 50 years,” said Dr. Harry Goodman, Director for the Office of Oral Health in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. “Unfortunately, this is because most people are diagnosed with oral cancer at a late stage.”

Nine out of ten people diagnosed with oral cancer use tobacco products, according to Maryland cancer data. “For smokers, other risk factors like heavy alcohol use, being over age 40, and becoming infected with the human papillomavirus can greatly increase the likelihood of developing oral cancer,” said Goodman.

“Quitting tobacco use is the best action anyone can take to prevent oral cancer,” said John M. Colmers, Maryland Secretary of Health. “And whether you smoke or not, there’s something else you can do—ask your physician or dentist for a yearly oral cancer exam.”

An oral cancer exam is a painless, two-minute exam that can be performed by a dental or medical provider. This can easily be done during your regular check-up or cleaning. The exam looks for unusual red or white skin patches or sores inside the mouth or on the lips and swelling in the head and neck region. Oral cancer is most successfully treated when these often-unnoticed skin changes are found early in the course of the disease while still painless.

Other ways to reduce your risk of oral cancer include limiting alcoholic drinks, using a lip balm with an SPF of at least 15 anytime you are outdoors, and having a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.

(more)

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If you have any of the following signs or symptoms for more than two weeks, see your dental or medical provider immediately.

- A white or red patch in the mouth
- A sore, irritation, lump or thickening of the mouth
- Hoarseness or feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty moving the tongue or jaw
- Numbness of the tongue or other areas of the mouth
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable

Tobacco users who need help with quitting can get free counseling and medication by calling The Maryland Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). This program provides phone based counseling and up to a four-week supply of nicotine patches or gum to tobacco users who are age 18 and over and meet basic health requirements. This free program is available to all callers regardless of income or how long they have smoked. The nicotine patches and gum are available only while supplies last and are provided on a first come, first served basis.

For more information about oral cancer prevention and programs in your area, please call your local health department or visit www.maryland-oralcancer.org.

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