

Top contributors to oral cancer

Researchers are not entirely sure what causes the gene mutations that lead to oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers.

While health professionals cannot say for sure why cancer forms, they do know that certain risk factors may lead to cells becoming cancerous.

Oral cancers develop in any of the parts of the oral cavity and throat. This can include the lips, gums, tongue, the inner lining of the cheeks, the roof of the mouth, and the floor of the mouth. According to the American Cancer Society, around 50,000 people will develop cancer of the mouth or throat in 2021. Knowing which behaviors may contribute to cancer formation can help people make changes that lower their risks for oral cancers.

Tobacco use

The Mayo Clinic says tobacco use of any kind, which includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco, and snuff, can contribute to oral cancers. Tobacco smoke can cause cancers anywhere in the



mouth or throat. Other products are linked to cancer in the parts of the lips or mouth that touch the tobacco product.

Alcohol use

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of developing oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers. The American Cancer Society says seven out of 10 people who have oral cancer are heavy drinkers.

Excessive sun exposure

Individuals who have had excessive exposure to the sun may develop cancer on the lips. Protecting the skin on the lips by using a sunscreen product for lips can reduce risk.

Skipping dental visits

Dentists perform routine cancer inspections during exams. Failure to visit the dentist regularly may prevent people from getting an early diagnosis and treatment for abnormalities in the mouth.

Human papilloma virus (HPV)

Verywell Health indicates HPV is the most commonly diagnosed sexually transmitted disease in the United States. The HPV-16 strain is linked to oral cancer, most commonly at the base of the tongue and in the tonsils.

Learning about the leading risk factors for oral cancer can help people take the necessary steps to change poor habits and behaviors.