

Head and Neck Cancer

Find cancer early



Approximately 760 people are diagnosed with head and neck cancer each year in Ireland. Head and neck cancer is a general term that covers many different types of cancer in any of the following areas: mouth, throat, larynx (voice box), salivary glands (glands in the jaw and neck that make saliva), nose, sinuses and middle ear.

Cancers of the head and neck are more common in people aged 50 years and older, and in people who smoke or drink large amounts of alcohol.

Find head and neck cancer early

If head and neck cancer is found early, it's easier to treat and there's a better chance of recovery.

Contact your doctor **without delay** if you have any of the following signs or symptoms for 3 weeks or more.

- Hoarseness
- Unexplained persistent sore throat
- Unexplained ear pain or unexplained one-sided head or neck pain
- Difficulty swallowing
- Unexplained lump or swelling in your head or neck
- A new droop in one side of your face
- Numbness or difficulty moving your tongue
- Changes in the colour of your gums or the inside of your cheeks, e.g. unexplained red and white patches in your mouth that are painful or swollen or bleeding
- Unexplained ulcers inside your mouth
- A tooth that is loose for no known reason
- Gums that don't heal fully after a tooth has been removed

For tips to reduce your risk of head and neck cancer, see the other side of this page.

Reduce your risk of head and neck cancer



Tobacco: Using tobacco products increases your risk of head and neck cancer. The best form of defence is not to start smoking. Quitting tobacco products reduces your cancer risk.



Alcohol: You can reduce your risk of head and neck cancer by cutting down the amount of alcohol you drink, or avoiding alcohol altogether. The less you drink the lower your risk.

Drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco: It is especially important not to drink alcohol and smoke at the same time. Alcohol helps cancer-causing substances in cigarettes to move through the body, especially to the mouth, head and neck.



Vaccinations: The HPV virus increases the risk of head and neck cancers. The HPV vaccine can protect against this virus. The HPV vaccine is offered to all girls and boys in secondary schools and other people who are at increased risk from HPV.



Skin protection: Protect your skin from the sun, including your lips and face, by wearing a wide brimmed hat, wraparound sunglasses and sunscreen.



Eating for health: Fruit, vegetables and wholegrains may help reduce your risk of head and neck cancer. Choosing healthy food and avoiding 'fast-foods', sugary drinks and sweets can help you to maintain a healthy body weight, which decreases your risk of head and neck cancer. Some studies also suggest that drinking coffee may reduce your risk of cancers of the mouth and throat.



Dental check-up: Get a check up with your dentist every year, even if you do not have any of your own natural teeth remaining.

For more information, visit:

- The HSE National Cancer Control Programme website:
www.hse.ie/cancerprevention
www.hse.ie/cancerearlydetection
- Mouth Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Ireland webpage: www.mouthcancer.ie