

# Head and Neck Cancer

## Early Detection is Vital



National Cancer  
Control Programme



Head and Neck cancer is cancer in any one of the following areas: mouth, pharynx (upper part of the throat), larynx (voice box), salivary glands (glands in the jaw and neck that make saliva), nasal cavity, sinuses and middle ear. About 500 people develop this type of cancer every year in Ireland.

It is commonest in people who are older, male, smokers and people who consume alcohol heavily, but it can also occur in younger men and women. More than 7 out of every 10 head and neck cancers are linked to tobacco and alcohol<sup>1</sup>.

### Detect Head and Neck cancer early

If Head and Neck cancer is found early, your chances of survival are much better than if it has picked up late.

Contact your doctor if you have any one of the following for *three weeks or more*<sup>2</sup>

- Hoarseness
- Unexplained persistent sore throat
- Unexplained ear pain or unexplained one-sided head or neck pain
- Difficulty swallowing
- Unexplained lump or swelling in the head and neck
- Numbness or difficulty moving your tongue
- Changes in the colour of your gums or the inside of your cheeks
- A new droop in one side of your face
- Unexplained ulcers inside your mouth
- A tooth that is moving or unstable for no known cause
- Gums that don't heal fully after a tooth has been removed

### Reduce your risk of developing Head and Neck cancer<sup>3,4</sup>

- Do not smoke. Do not use any form of tobacco. For support to quit smoking go to [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) or call 1800 201 203.
- For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol. Alcohol aids the movement of cancer-causing substances from cigarettes through the body, especially to the mouth, head and neck. For more information go to [www.askaboutalcohol.ie](http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie)
- Have the HPV vaccine if it is offered to you. For more information visit [www.hpv.ie](http://www.hpv.ie)
- Protect your skin from the sun, including the lips and face. Visit the [SunSmart hub](#) for more information.
- Have a check-up with your dentist every year
- There is some evidence that eating fruit and non-starchy vegetables and drinking coffee can help to reduce your risk of head and neck cancer<sup>5</sup>, so try to include these as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

### For more information visit

- HSE's [National Cancer Control Programme Cancer Prevention Hub](#)
- HSE's [National Cancer Control Programme Early Detection of Cancer Hub](#)
- [Mouth Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Ireland](#)

## Reference

1. <https://www.ncri.ie/atlas/123-risk-factors>
2. National Cancer Control Programme, Head and Neck Cancer Referral Advice for Primary Care: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/profinfo/resources/head%20and%20neck%20cancer%20referral%20advice%20for%20primary%20care.pdf>
3. World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Diet Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018.
4. Wild CP, Weiderpass E, Stewart BW, editors (2020). World Cancer Report: Cancer Research for Cancer Prevention. Lyon, France: International Agency for Research on Cancer. Available from: <http://publications.iarc.fr/586>.
5. <https://www.ncri.ie/atlas/123-risk-factors>