



# Mouth Cancer Awareness Day

**The sixth Mouth Cancer Awareness Day (MCAD) is on Wednesday 21 September 2016 and organised by Mouth Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Ireland (MHNCAI)\*.**



The objective of MCAD is to raise public and professional awareness and to stress the importance of early detection and referral. Worryingly, many people are still unaware of the existence of mouth cancer as a disease, which is increasing, and it affects men and women of all ages, including those who are not in 'at risk' categories, such as smokers and heavy drinkers.

Smoking or drinking alcohol are the most important risk factors for mouth cancer. The risk of these cancers is even higher in people who both smoke and drink alcohol. Over exposure to the sun increases the risk of lip cancer. Exposure to the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) 16, which may be spread through oral sex, can also be associated with mouth cancer.

## What are the symptoms?

- A sore area or ulcer in the mouth that does not heal within three weeks.
- White or red patches inside the mouth.
- Lump developing in the mouth or neck.
- Thickening or hardening of the cheek or tongue.

- Difficulty chewing, swallowing or moving the tongue.
- Numbness of the tongue or face.
- A persistent sore throat or pain in the ear.
- Persistent hoarseness of the voice.
- Persistent nosebleeds and a stuffy nose.
- Sudden, unexplained looseness of the teeth.

**If any of these symptoms persist for more than three weeks, it is important to have them checked by a dentist or doctor.**

According to the National Cancer Registry Ireland, approximately 50% of all mouth cancers are diagnosed at an advanced stage. This can result in more complex treatment with a greater impact on quality of life and overall survival. Early detection of mouth cancer greatly improves the chances of survival. Dentists have an obvious role in early detection as they check for changes in the soft tissues of the mouth at every dental visit. They also have a key role to play in the prevention of the disease by

identifying those patients who are exposed to risk factors. Pharmacists have a very important role as members of the public often consult them about a sore mouth. Mouth cancer awareness can also be incorporated into a pharmacy-led smoking cessation service when engaging with a patient during the pre-consultation or during opportunistic advice.

MCAD 2016 is an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between dentists and pharmacists. We should work together to empower the public to take responsibility for and to improve their health and wellbeing, raising awareness of the impact of lifestyle behaviours on their oral and general health. It is important to make every contact count to identify mouth cancer early.

This year, members of the public are encouraged to attend their dentist on 21 September for a mouth examination. There will also be information and advice available in the Dental Hospitals in Cork and Dublin. Pharmacists can help to promote the day by displaying the Mouth Cancer Awareness Day 2016 Infographic in their

Pharmacies (<http://bit.ly/MCADInfograph>).

MHNCAI and the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) have developed a toolkit, 'Head and Neck Cancer Referral Advice for Primary Care', to assist all health professionals to recognise suspicious clinical features of mouth head and neck cancer for urgent referral. The toolkit is available at <http://bit.ly/HeadandNeckCancer>.

To find out more about mouth cancer, the signs and symptoms and the risk factors, see [www.mouthcancerawareness.ie](http://www.mouthcancerawareness.ie).

Mouth cancer survivor and member of MHNCAI, Mr Reginald MacMahon, has previously written about his experiences with the disease in the September 2014 issue of the *IPU Review*.

\*Members of MHNCAI are Cancer Survivors, Dublin Dental University Hospital, Cork University Dental School & Hospital, Dental Health Foundation, Irish Cancer Society and Irish Dental Association.