



Gum Disease Linked with Oral Cancer Causing Virus

Gum disease and other dental ailments increase the risk of becoming infected with oral Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), a sexually transmitted virus. A new study discovered that HPV is responsible for 40 to 80 percent of all throat cancers.

Those who reported being in poor oral health had a 56 percent higher rate of oral HPV infection than those who felt their oral health was good to excellent, researchers wrote in a study published in *Cancer Prevention Research*, a journal of the American Association for Cancer Research.

Poor oral health causing sores in the mouth or throat along with inflamed gums are believed to act as portals for HPV to enter the body. Those in good oral health don't have such portals. As such, even when exposed to HPV, there is a reduced chance of infection.

Oral HPV infection is similar to genital HPV infection in that there are low and high-risk variations. Low-risk oral HPV can progress to non-cancerous tumors or warts in the mouth and throat, while high risk variants can lead to cancers of the mouth and throat, the researchers said. The August 2013 study however was the first to show a link between poor oral health and oral HPV infection, said Christine Markham, study author.

Our patients will be relieved to know that Dr. Novack follows an unwavering protocol at each and every Periodontal Supportive Maintenance visit of performing an oral cancer screening evaluation.

"This is just another really good reason to take good care of your teeth and your mouth," said Christine Markham, Associate Professor of Health Promotion and Behavioral Science at the University Of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston. "Our findings show that even when you control for known risk factors for oral HPV infections such as smoking and oral sex behaviors, poor oral health is an independent risk factor for oral HPV infection."

Disease Pathway

Poor oral health, the most common cause of inflamed gums is suspected to act as a portal allowing the HPV entry into the body, while those in good oral health don't appear to have those portals so even exposure to HPV doesn't trigger an infection. According to Christine Markham "More research is needed to better understand the connection between poor oral hygiene and HPV infection".

The American Cancer Society noted most people with HPV infections of the throat and mouth are non symptomatic. Unfortunately, there are currently no approved tests for oral HPV infection.

Merck & Co. (MRK)'s vaccine Gardasil prevents cervical cancer caused by the sexually transmitted virus in girls and boys. GlaxoSmithKline Plc (GSK) also markets an HPV vaccine. Neither however are approved

to prevent oral cancers. The virus infects 4 out of 5 sexually active people at some point in their lives and is known to cause cervical, vulvar, vaginal, penile and anal cancer.

Self Reports

A study revealed in August 2013 evaluated 3,439 people ages 30 to 69 years old who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey asked them to rate their oral health, whether they had gum disease and how many teeth they had lost.

The researchers found that men, smokers, those who used marijuana and those who had multiple oral sex partners had a higher chance of oral HPV infections. Poor oral (periodontal) health was also independently linked to an increased susceptibility to oral HPV infection. This study found that those with gum disease (periodontitis) had a 51% higher risk of oral HPV than those whose gum disease was controlled.

The American Cancer Society anticipates that 36,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed in the next year with cancers of the mouth and throat and approximately 6,850 will die from the disease. Given Canada's population being approximately 10% that of the United States, these statistics are similarly a cause for concern here.

