What Is Oral Cancer Screening?

Oral cancer screening is an examination performed by a dentist or doctor to look for signs of cancer in your mouth.

Screening may identify mouth cancer early, when there is a greater chance for a cure.

Who Can Benefit from Screening?

People at high risk for oral cancer may benefit from oral cancer screening. Here are some things that increase the risk of oral cancer:

- Any kind of tobacco use, including the following:
  - Cigarettes
  - Cigars
  - Pipes
- Smoking and drinking alcohol. People who use both tobacco and alcohol are at greater risk of developing these cancers than people who use either tobacco or alcohol alone.
- Sun exposure. Long-term sun exposure to the face increases the risk of cancer on the lips.
- A previous diagnosis of oral cancer.
- Infection with a certain strain of human papillomavirus (HPV). Some non-smokers develop mouth and throat cancer that could be connected with unprotected oral sex.

How Is Oral Cancer Screening Done?

A dentist or medical doctor can screen for oral cancer during a routine check-up. The exam will include looking inside the mouth and feeling around the neck area for lumps or anything else that isn’t normal. The doctor or dentist looks inside the mouth for problems that could become cancer, such as sores or abnormal patches in the mouth lining.

What Signs Warn of Possible Oral Cancer?

Make an appointment with your doctor or dentist if you notice any of these symptoms lasting longer than two weeks:

- A sore throat that doesn’t heal
- A lump or thickening inside your mouth
- A white or reddish patch inside your mouth
- Loose teeth
- A change in the way your dentures fit
- Tongue pain
- Jaw pain or stiffness
- Difficult or painful chewing
- A feeling that something is caught in your throat

For more information about oral cancer, visit or call the G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center (CLC). The CLC is located on the sixth floor of Huntsman Cancer Institute’s Cancer Hospital. Visit the CLC Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or call 801-581-6365 or 1-888-424-2100 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.