What Is Salivary Gland Cancer?
Cancer in the glands that make saliva is called salivary gland cancer. Saliva moistens the mouth and helps dissolve food. Large clusters of salivary glands are under the tongue, on the sides of the face just in front of the ears, and under the jawbone. Smaller clusters are found in other parts of the upper digestive system.

Stages of Salivary Gland Cancer
Stage I. The cancer is two centimeters or less in diameter and has not spread outside the salivary glands.
Stage II. The cancer is larger than two centimeters but not larger than four centimeters in diameter and has not spread outside the salivary glands.
Stage III. Any of the following may be true:
  • The cancer is less than four centimeters in diameter and has spread to a single lymph node.
  • The cancer is larger than four centimeters in diameter and has spread into the skin, soft tissue, bone, or nerve around the gland. The cancer may have spread to one lymph node.
Stage IV. Any of the following may be true:
  • The cancer is very large.
  • The cancer has spread into other tissues of the neck.
  • The cancer has spread into multiple lymph nodes of the neck or into other parts of the body.
Recurrent. Recurrent cancer is cancer that comes back after it has been treated. It may come back in the salivary glands or in another part of the body.

What Are the Symptoms?
These are symptoms of salivary gland cancer:
• Swelling under the chin or around the jawbone
• Numbness or paralysis of the muscles in the face
• Pain in the face, chin, or neck that does not go away

How Is It Diagnosed?
Your health care provider will examine you and feel for lumps in your throat, neck, and mouth. Doctors may also take some images of your head. If abnormal tissue is found, the doctor may remove a small piece. This is called a biopsy. Doctors look at the biopsy under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

What Is Staging?
If the biopsy shows cancer cells, you will have more tests to find out if cancer has spread to other parts of the body. This is called staging. It helps your health care team plan the best treatment.

Salivary gland cancers are also classified by grade. This tells how fast the cancer cells are growing. Low-grade cancers grow more slowly. High-grade cancers grow more quickly.

How Is It Treated?
Three main types of treatment are used: surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy.
Surgery. Depending on where the cancer is and how far it has spread, your doctor may use surgery to cut out tissue around the cancer. If the cancer has spread to lymph nodes in the neck, your doctor may remove them, too.
Radiation therapy. Radiation therapy uses high-energy beams to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Radiation may come from a machine or from placing a radiation source inside the body near the cancer.
**Chemotherapy.** Chemotherapy uses strong drugs to kill cancer cells. It may be taken by pill or injected into the bloodstream. Chemotherapy for salivary gland cancer is being tested in clinical trials.

**What Type of Treatment Will I Need?**
You and your health care team will plan your treatment depending on the stage and grade of the cancer.

**Stage I.** For both low- and high-grade stage I cancers, doctors use surgery and may use radiation therapy.

**Stage II.** For both low- and high-grade stage II cancers, doctors use surgery possibly followed by radiation therapy. Chemotherapy may be used if a low-grade cancer does not respond to surgery or radiation. Specialized radiation therapy may be used for some high-grade cancers.

**Stage III.** For stage III cancer, the treatment options are similar to those for stage II cancers.

**Stage IV.** For stage IV cancer, the treatment may be specialized radiation therapy, or chemotherapy, with or without radiation therapy.

**Recurrent.** In recurrent salivary gland cancers, the treatment depends on the type of cancer the patient has, where the cancer came back, the previous treatment, and the patient’s general health. Specialized radiation therapy or chemotherapy may be recommended.

**Will Treatment Leave Permanent Changes?**
Treatment may leave some permanent changes on the face. If necessary, your doctors will use surgery or a facial prosthesis to restore function and appearance.

**Patient and Family Support** staff offer counseling to help you cope with cancer treatment and its side effects. For more information, call 801-585-9755.

The **Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness-Survivorship Center** promotes physical and emotional well-being and a sense of balance for people diagnosed with cancer and their loved ones. Wellness-Survivorship Center programs and services complement medical care during and after treatment. For more information, call 801-587-4585.