

## Oral Sex Causes Rise in Throat Cancer

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A recent conference held by the American Association for Cancer Research to discuss the role of the sexually transmitted Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) in head and neck cancer announced that changing sexual practices have led to a dramatic rise in throat cancer in the United States over the past two decades, and experts fear an epidemic of the disease.

Increasing rates of HPV infection, spread through oral sex, is largely driving the rapid rise in oropharyngeal cancers, which include tumors of the throat, tonsils, and base of the tongue. Oral cancer has 3 times as many victims as cervical cancer, striking about 28,500 Americans a year and causing an estimated 6,100 deaths.

The percentage of oropharyngeal cancers that are HPV positive is much higher now than it was 20 years ago, according to a leading researcher at the University of Texas Anderson Cancer Center. Twenty years ago it was only about 20%, and today it is estimated that 60% of these tumors are HPV positive. It is this trend that has doctors concerned of an epidemic.

Smoking and alcohol abuse were once considered the only major risk factors for these cancers, but no longer. The American Cancer Society says that as many as half of these cancers diagnosed today appear to be caused by HPV infection. The patients are younger, and don't fit the high risk profile.

It is necessary for the public to know that their likelihood for developing oropharyngeal cancer increases 30% if they are HPV positive. For this reason, I would highly suggest that patients share the results of any blood work with their dentist.

A fluorescence visualization device (VELscope) has been developed and employed by dentists to enhance the early discovery and recognition of any oral soft tissue abnormality. It goes beyond reviewing the patient's medical and family history and a white light visual tour of the soft tissue and throat. It is safe and non-invasive, and it facilitates a discovery at the earliest possible stages, especially when there may be no symptoms and it may be so subtle as to be overlooked in a standard examination.

To learn more about the VELscope oral cancer screening, call A Unique Dental Experience® at (661) 254-4000 or visit [www.drdell.com](http://www.drdell.com).