Editorial

HAVE YOU BEEN CHECKED?
IT ONLY TAKES 2 MINUTES!

You can accomplish a lot of tasks in two minutes – check your email, pay a bill online, maybe even save your smile, and your life! Brushing your teeth for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste, twice a day can save your smile. Taking the time for a painless two minute oral cancer exam during a regular medical or dental check-up can save your life.

Oral cancer is highly preventable if the correct steps are taken. Adults over 40 years of age should get an annual oral cancer exam from their dental or medical provider. Even if you wear dentures, you should have your mouth and surrounding head and neck region examined once a year to check for oral cancer. Using tobacco products, drinking alcohol and spending a lot of time in the sun increase your risk for developing oral cancer.

Quitting the use of all tobacco products significantly reduces the risk of developing oral cancer. The Maryland Tobacco Quitline is a free service provided by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to help people quit using tobacco products. For more information about the Maryland Tobacco Quitline, call 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669), or visit www.quitnow.net/maryland.

Certain sexual behaviors may expose you to the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) which also places you at risk for developing oral cancer. There are more than 40 types of HPV that can infect the mouth and throat as well as the genital areas. Most people who become infected with HPV do not know that they are infected. HPV can cause cancers in the back of the throat, most commonly in the base of the tongue and tonsils. Cancer caused by HPV often takes years to develop after initially getting an HPV infection.

Remember, early detection is important. Ask your dental or medical provider for an oral cancer exam and get checked today! For more information, please visit the Office of Oral Health's website at http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/oralhealth/.

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