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Prevent Oral Cancer
April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month

Baltimore, MD (April XX, 2012) – Two minutes can save your life.

A painless, two-minute oral cancer exam can be performed by a dental or medical provider during your regular check-up or cleaning. The exam looks for unusual red or white skin patches or sores inside the mouth and on the tongue or lips and swelling in the head and neck region. Oral cancer is most successfully treated when these often-unnoticed skin changes are found early in the course of the disease while still painless.

April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month in Maryland focusing on educating the public about the risk factors, signs and symptoms of the disease.

Nine out of ten people diagnosed with oral cancer use tobacco products, according to Maryland cancer data. “Quitting tobacco use is the best action anyone can take to prevent oral cancer,” said Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D., Maryland Secretary of Health. Other ways to reduce your risk of oral cancer include limiting alcoholic drinks, using a lip balm with an SPF of at least 15 anytime you are outdoors, having a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, and limiting certain sexual behaviors that place you at higher risk for exposure to the Human Papillomavirus (HPV).

Approximately 550 Marylanders will be diagnosed with oral cancer this year. “The survival rate for oral cancer, unlike most other cancers, hasn’t improved much over the past 50 years,” said Dr. Harry Goodman, Director for the Office of Oral Health in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. “Unfortunately, this is because most people are diagnosed with oral cancer at a late stage. For smokers, other risk factors like heavy alcohol use and being over age 40 play a role in the disease process. In general, we are seeing a decrease in oral cancers related to smoking. Unfortunately researchers are seeing an increase in oral cancers associated with

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HPV infection, a sexually transmitted disease,” said Goodman.

If you have any of the following signs or symptoms for more than two weeks, see your dental or medical provider immediately.

- A white or red patch in the mouth
- A sore, irritation, lump or thickening of the mouth
- Hoarseness or feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty moving the tongue or jaw
- Numbness of the tongue or other areas of the mouth
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable

Tobacco users who need help with quitting can get free counseling and medication by calling The Maryland Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). This program provides phone-based counseling and up to a four-week supply of nicotine patches or gum to tobacco users who are age 18 and over and meet basic health requirements. This free program is available to all callers regardless of income or how long they have smoked. The nicotine patches and gum are available only while supplies last and are provided on a first come, first served basis.

For more information about oral cancer prevention and the Maryland 1-800-QUIT NOW program, please call your local health department or visit

<http://fha.dhmh.maryland.gov/oralhealth>.

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