



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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TOBACCO USERS FACE RISK OF ORAL CANCER

Lifestyle changes offer best hope to prevent this deadly disease

(LEONARDTOWN, MD) June 20, 2007 –St. Mary's County Health Department's Tobacco Prevention Program, is raising awareness that tobacco use is linked to more than just lung cancer. Tobacco users also run the risk of developing cancer of the mouth, or oral cancer. In fact, according to Maryland cancer data, 90 percent of those diagnosed with mouth cancer use tobacco products.

"The good news about mouth cancer is that it is highly preventable," said Lana Horton, RN, community health educator at the health department. Tobacco use, alcohol use, and sun exposure are all risk factors for mouth cancer. Eliminating tobacco, moderating alcohol use and adopting healthier sun safety practices, reduce these risk factors and offers the best protection from this deadly disease.

Encouraging tobacco users to quit their unhealthy lifestyle is just one of the ideas being promoted locally during Oral Cancer Awareness Week, June 24 – 30. Health department staff will be talking about the dangers of tobacco use this month at St. Mary's River Concert Series at St. Mary's College.

Quitting tobacco is challenging for most people. Often, it takes several attempts to be successful. The health department is encouraging tobacco users to attend one of its 8 week smoking cessation

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programs beginning in the fall. These free programs hold classes weekly, providing education, support and resources for participants. Tobacco users who need help with quitting are also encouraged to use Maryland's free telephone quit line, 1800 QUIT-NOW to get additional support and resources to kick the habit for good.

"Helping people to understand that getting treatment early increases the odds of surviving this aggressive cancer, is another important part of our educational program," noted Horton. We want to motivate people to learn their risk factors and to recognize the early symptoms of the disease. Dentists, dental hygienists, and physicians should provide exams for mouth cancer on an annual basis. If you are not sure if you have had an exam for mouth cancer, be sure to ask your health care provider at your next visit.

On the other hand, if you have any of the following signs or symptoms for more than two weeks, see your dentist or physician 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.

For more information about mouth cancer prevention, call St. Mary's County Health Department's Wellness and Health Promotion Program at 301-475-4356, or visit > www.maryland-oralcancer.org <.

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