

Head and Neck Cancer

Head and neck cancer develops when cancerous cells grow in areas of the head or neck. These cancers can begin in the larynx (voice box), hypopharynx (lower throat), nasopharynx (upper throat), oral cavity (mouth), oropharynx (throat), nose, paranasal sinuses, or salivary glands.

The name of the cancer is based on where it starts. For example, cancers that begin in the throat are called pharyngeal cancer. “Pharynx” is the medical term for throat.

Statistics

- While statistics are not available for all head and neck cancer types, in 2026, an estimated 60,480 new cases of oral cavity and pharynx cancers will be diagnosed in the United States.
- An estimated 13,150 people will die from cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx in 2026.
- The five-year survival rate for cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx is 69% overall.

Risk Factors

The major risk factors for head and neck cancer are:

- **Tobacco Use:** Tobacco contains harmful chemicals that can damage the DNA in the mouth, throat, and voice box.
- **Heavy Alcohol Consumption:** Heavy, long-term alcohol use can significantly increase risk of head and neck cancers.
- **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection:** Ongoing infection with high-risk HPV, especially HPV 16, is a significant risk factor for head and neck cancer.

Symptoms

The symptoms of head and neck cancer differ from person to person, but here are some common signs:

- Sores in the mouth that bleed easily and do not heal
- Persistent red or white patch in the mouth or throat
- Lump in the mouth or neck
- Thickening of tissue in the throat or mouth
- Ear pain
- Coughing up blood
- Difficulty chewing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty moving the tongue or jaw

Prevention

Many head and neck cancers can be prevented. You can lower your risk by:

- Quitting smoking
- Limiting or avoiding alcohol use
- Getting the HPV vaccine to prevent new infections with the types of HPV that can cause oropharyngeal and other cancers
- Wearing sunscreen regularly to protect against UV rays
- Getting regular dental checkups, which can help detect oral, head, and neck cancers early

Treatment Options

Depending on the stage of disease, location of the tumor, and whether it tests positive for HPV, head and neck cancer may be treated using one or a combination of the following treatments:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy

About Texas Oncology

Founded in 1986, Texas Oncology is an independent, physician-led practice and a member of the US Oncology Network. With more than 550 physicians and 300 locations across Texas, Texas Oncology serves over 250,000 cancer patients each year.

Texas Oncology provides advanced care across 19 specialties and offers a comprehensive clinical trials and research program that has contributed to the development of more than 100 FDA-approved cancer therapies. Learn more at [TexasOncology.com](https://www.texasoncology.com).