

NHS Lothian launch mouth cancer awareness campaign

Dentists and surgeons in Edinburgh are anxious to get the message across about signs of mouth cancer. They are taking to the streets this week to raise awareness.

The “Let’s Talk About Mouth Cancer” campaign has been set up to provide information and support to tackle the oral disease, which is increasing in the UK.

NHS postgraduate trainees at the Edinburgh Dental Institute will deliver oral health messages at various sites in Edinburgh and use social media and their website to make sure they get their point across.

The campaign, which runs from 11-13 February, is a collaborative project between NHS Lothian and Edinburgh University and will urge people ‘If in doubt, check it out’.

One of the main events will be free mouth screening, carried out by qualified clinicians from Edinburgh Dental Institute, for members of the public in Bristo Square on Wednesday 12 February.

Professor Victor Lopes, Consultant Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, NHS Lothian, said: “Early detection and timely treatment of mouth cancer is vital. and can lead to a significantly improved survival rate.”

“It cannot be stressed enough – the earlier a cancer is detected, the better the treatment options and outcome.

“Remember, most mouth conditions are not cancerous. If you are in any doubt, check it out with a dentist, doctor or pharmacist or come along to the screening event on 12 February. Also make sure you have regular dental checks and

look after your health.”

Mouth cancer affects all age groups – with a significant rise among people under 45 years – and there are now more cases of mouth cancer in the UK each year than cases of cervical cancer in women and testicular cancer in men put together.

The campaign has important messages for people of all ages, but organisers are keen to target specific groups, including young people and people from ethnic minorities.

Niall Mc Goldrick, Longitudinal Dental Foundation Trainee, Edinburgh Dental Institute, added: “This campaign will bring an extremely important message to the streets of Edinburgh and to a wider population via our social media campaign.

“‘If in doubt, check it out’ is one of the key messages of our campaign so we would encourage people to be vigilant and screen their own mouths for the signs of Mouth Cancer.”

Staff from the Minority Ethnic Health Inclusion Service (MEHIS) will also be present at the stall in Bristo Square on 12 February, providing advice and information on lifestyle and oral health.

Michael Walton, Founder of The Ben Walton Trust, said: “The trust is really pleased to be associated with this campaign. A problem with this disease is poor public and professional knowledge which leads to delay in referral to specialist treatment. This campaign proactively addresses these issues and could save lives.”

Common risk factors include:

- Regular high alcohol intake
- Smoking
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. World-wide, HPV is the most widespread sexually transmitted virus
- Poor diet

- Poor oral hygiene.

People who combine smoking and regular high alcohol intake increase by 40 times their risk of developing mouth cancer. But some younger patients with the disease have none of these risk factors, which is why it's important to check regularly for signs of mouth cancer.

Signs to look out for include:

- Oral lumps that grow
- Oral ulcers that do not heal after two weeks
- Red, white or mixed patches in the mouth
- Persistent soreness in the mouth
- Bleeding in the mouth
- Lump in your neck.