



Head & Neck Cancer

Know the warning signs

**Find it early to increase
treatment success**

Remember...

When found early, most cancers in the head and neck can be treated successfully. Recovery rates for these cancers could be greatly improved if people sought medical advice as soon as possible. If you think you have one of the warning signs of head and neck cancer, see your doctor right away.

Here's what you should watch for...

A lump in your neck

Cancers that begin in the head and neck often spread to the lymph nodes in the neck before they spread elsewhere. **A lump in your neck that lasts more than 3 weeks should be seen by your GP.** Not all lumps are cancer but it could be the first sign of cancer of the mouth, throat, voice box or thyroid gland. It could also be from a cancer on your skin that has already been removed. These lumps are usually painless and grow steadily.

Change in your voice

Most cancers in the larynx (voice box) cause some change in your voice. Any hoarseness or other voice change lasting more than 3 weeks should alert you to see your GP.

A growth in your mouth

Many cancers of the mouth or tongue cause a sore or swelling that doesn't go away. They may be painless, they may bleed and they may become infected. An ulcer under a denture that does not heal may also be a concern.

Swallowing problems

Cancer of the throat may make swallowing food and fluid difficult or painful. Food may 'stick' at a certain point and might eventually go down to your stomach or come back up.

Changes in your skin

Skin cancers are common in New Zealand due to our high levels of UV light.

The most common head and neck cancer is basal cell cancer of the skin. These are usually easy to treat.

Other kinds of cancer, including squamous cell cancer and malignant melanoma, also occur on the skin of the face and neck. Many squamous cell cancers occur on the lower lip and ear.

Sometimes they can come back even after they have been treated. They often come back as lumps in the neck or around the ears.

If you have a sore that does not heal on your lip, face, scalp or ear or you notice a lump or lumps in the neck that are not healing, see your GP immediately.