

Why we keep an eye on oral cancer in childhood cancer survivors

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What did the study want to find out?

This large international study with Swiss contribution investigated whether people who had cancer as a child later develop oral cancer more often than the general population. Oral cancer is very rare and can develop on the tongue, gums or the roof of the mouth, for example.

Why is this important?

Cancer treatments for children and adolescents destroy cancer cells. The treatment tries to fight cancer cells only. Nevertheless, it can happen that the treatment also damages healthy cells. For this reason, and sometimes also due to a genetic predisposition, children with cancer have an increased risk of developing another tumor later in life.

What did the study exactly do?

In this large international study from 12 European countries, researchers analyzed data from almost 70,000 people who were diagnosed with cancer in childhood or adolescence. Switzerland contributed anonymized data to this important study. The researchers investigated how many childhood cancer patients developed oral cancer later in life.

What did the study find out and what does this mean?

The overall risk of developing oral cancer was low. Up to the age of 65, oral cancer was diagnosed in less than 1% of participants. Nevertheless, former childhood cancer patients were affected more frequently than the general population, especially in young adulthood (20-29 years).

Childhood cancer survivors should know that the overall risk of oral cancer is low. Nevertheless, a doctor should be consulted as a precautionary measure if wounds, swelling or stains in the mouth that cannot be wiped off persist for more than 2 weeks. The doctor can carry out further examinations and, if necessary, initiate treatment quickly. The risk of oral cavity cancer can be reduced by reducing alcohol consumption and avoiding smoking.

Further information: www.swiss-ccss.ch

Reference: Sunguc C, Hawkins MM, Winter DL, et al. Risk of subsequent primary oral cancer in a cohort of 69,460 5-year survivors of childhood and adolescent cancer in Europe: the PanCareSurFup study. *British Journal of Cancer*. 2023;128(1):80-90. doi:10.1038/s41416-022-02016-w

You can find the full article in English [here](#).

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