

UNITED STATES: "Oral Sex Linked to Cancer Risk"
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Data supports the connection of oral sex to cancer, announced US scientists during Sunday's American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Washington.

Ohio State University College of Medicine Professor Maura Gillison advocated further research into how human papillomaviruses (HPVs) may have contributed to the 225 percent increase in US oral cancer cases from 1974 to 2007, primarily among young white males. Today, US HPV-related oral cancer surpasses cases linked to tobacco use, still the predominant cause of such cancers worldwide.

"When you compare people who have an oral infection or not . the single greatest factor is the number of partners on whom the person has performed oral sex," said Gillison. "When the number of partners increases, the risk increases," she said.

Earlier studies have indicated that people with six or more oral sex partners over a lifetime are eight times more susceptible to HPV-related head or neck cancer than those with less than six partners, according to Gillison.

Unfortunately, young people are often clueless to the risks, said University of California-San Francisco Professor Bonnie Halpern-Felsher. "Health care providers . parents, and other educators . are not talking to teens about oral sex, period," she said. "Teens really have no idea that oral sex is related to any outcome like [sexually transmitted infections], HPV, chlamydia, and so on."

The oral cancer field lags behind that of cervical cancer, which has a more widely known link to HPV, observed University of Missouri researcher Diane Harper, who co-presented with Halpern-Felsher at the conference. However, head and neck cancers could benefit from technology already utilized for identifying HPV in cervical cancer, said Harper.

National Cancer Institute data documents upwards of 150 different HPV types, approximately 40 of which are sexually transmitted and linked to genital warts, oral, anal, vaginal, and penile cancers.