

19/08/2010

Press release: Immediate

Title: Hollywood star's diagnosis highlights high risk of mouth cancer.

THE British Dental Health Foundation, which runs UK Mouth Cancer Action Month each November, is calling for more attention to be paid to mouth cancers reminding people that *there is a death from mouth cancer on average every 5 hours in the UK.*

Oral health experts and the Foundation are advising the public to regularly check their mouths after news broke this week of actor Michael Douglas being diagnosed with oral cancer.

The Academy Award winner has recently been diagnosed with a tumour in his throat, and now faces an eight-week course of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

This high profile case has brought oral cancers into the lime light, and oral health experts are keen to make the public more aware of the key risk factors and early warning signs.

Douglas quit smoking in 2006, after a long 'half a packet a day' habit. Yet, the possibility of developing oral cancer remains higher for ex-smokers than non-smokers for 20 years after quitting.

Tobacco is considered to be the main cause of mouth cancer, with three in four cases being linked to smoking. Drinking in excess is also a known factor, with those who both smoke and drink to excess being up 30 times more likely to be at risk.

The Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter said: "It is crucial the public know about the risk factors and early symptoms as early detection can save lives. Survival rates can increase from just 50% to over 90% with early detection - yet over two thirds of cases are diagnosed at a late stage.

"Many people have not heard of mouth cancer, and do not realise how common it is – latest figures show that over 5,300 cases are diagnosed in the UK in a year and that men over the age of 40 are twice as likely to develop the condition as women."

Other risk factors include a poor diet. Research has shown that an increased intake of fish, vegetables, fruit and eggs can help lower risks of cancer. The Human Papilloma virus (HPV) is also linked to the disease, with US studies have linking more than 20,000 cancer cases to HPV in the last five years. The virus can be transmitted via oral sex.

If Douglas' treatment is unsuccessful his treatment is likely to be either a partial or complete laryngectomy which can cause voice changes or the loss of voice completely; for an actor this could massively impact their career.

Dr Nigel Carter added: "This case shows just how devastating and life-changing mouth or oral cancer can be and it really is vital the public know what to do if they spot a problem."

Early warning signs include: a non-healing mouth ulcer, red or white patches in the mouth and any unusual lumps or swelling. The Foundation advises anyone with any of these symptoms to visit their dentist for further examination.

For advice on other oral health concerns contact the Dental Helpline on 0845 063 1188 for free and confidential support. This service is run by fully qualified oral health experts and deals with a wide range of topics from mouth cancer to gum disease to how to care for your teeth.

This November is Mouth Cancer Action Month. Organised by the British Dental Health Foundation, the campaign is designed to raise awareness of the disease. The Foundation raises funds and awareness through the Blue Ribbon Badge Appeal. Professionals can support the campaign by wearing and selling badges in their practices, pharmacies, hospitals and surgeries. Please contact the Foundation on 01788 539 793 to request a kit.

---ENDS---

Editor's Notes

For further information please contact the Foundation's Press Office on 01788 539 792 or email pr@dentalhealth.org

You can find more information on mouth cancer at the website www.mouthcancer.org

One person dies every five hours in the UK from mouth cancer, making it the UK's fastest growing cancer.

Mouth cancer is twice more common in men than in women, though an increasing number of women are being diagnosed with the disease. Previously, the disease has been five times more common in men than women.

Age is another factor, with people over the age of 40 more likely to be diagnosed, though more young people are now being affected than previously.

People who smoke and drink to excess have been found to be at a higher risk, and are up to 30 times more likely to develop mouth cancer.

Poor diet is linked to a third of all cancer cases, and experts suggest HPV could overtake tobacco and alcohol as the main risk factor within the coming decade.

The charity strongly advises people of all ages to check their mouths and have regular dental appointments.

Initial signs of the disease include a non-healing mouth ulcer, a red or white patch in the mouth, or unusual lumps or swelling in the mouth.