

THE LINK BETWEEN HPV & ORAL SEX

BY RAYCHEL HARVEY-JONES

ORAL FITNESS EXPERTS SAY THAT THROAT CANCER IS BECOMING A NATIONAL HEALTH EPIDEMIC.

What do maggots, tomato plants, and oral cancer all have in common? They have all been found inside someone's mouth.

As a dentist in practice for over 30 years, Dr. Gary Glassman ("Dr. G") thought he had seen it all. "I have removed maggots from a child's gums and a tomato plant that was growing from a seed in another patient. Oral fitness is as important as physical fitness, this week a young man died in California from a tooth infection that spread to his lungs," says Dr. G.

I will admit I am a little nervous when it comes to visiting the dentist, over the years I have been lucky enough to find very patient dentists who have gradually rid me of my fear. After interviewing Dr. G, I plan on making it a priority to regularly visit the dentist. There is a much bigger problem in the U.S. that's slowly becoming an epidemic – throat cancer.

Dr. G is concerned about the growing numbers of mouth

and throat cancer caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) that is transmitted during oral sex.

Dr. G, a leading global oral fitness expert, says, "The scary part about the growing concern of oral cancer among men is that we think of oral sex as a safer alternative to intercourse."

According to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the HPV virus is the most sexually transmitted infection in the United States, and it's showing up in men aged 40-60 years old. Skeptical? Just ask actor Michael Douglas.

The HPV vaccine is a must before you are sexually active. However, if you haven't had the vaccine there are measures you can take, ask your dentist "it's not worth the risk."

In an interview published in The Guardian newspaper in London, Douglas mentioned that his throat cancer could have been brought on by oral sex, a common way to become infected with HPV. (Douglas later admitted he actually had tongue cancer and "regrets blaming his wife's vagina.")

"We are seeing the HPV-

positive throat cancer more in older men as they produce less saliva. Saliva acts as a natural coating that protects

the mouth from infections. Also, there are a plethora of medications used everyday by older guys that cause dry mouth: medications like Ibuprofen and Amoxicillin," says Dr. G.

There are about 200 different strains of HPV. Some cause common warts when they invade the skin. Others are the cause of sexually transmitted diseases.

"HPV can cause cervical cancer, as well as cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils, though these are not the same strains of the virus. Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. More than half of American men who are having sex will get HPV at some point in their lives," adds Dr. G.

According to the CDC, there is no approved test to check for HPV in the mouth or throat; this is why regular visits to your dentist are critical. A dentist can monitor any changes in your mouth. There are HPV tests that can be used to screen for cervical cancer.

"Your mouth is crucial when it comes to your overall general health. Treat your dentist's chair as an extension of your trips to the gym; it's just as vital to your health and fitness," adds Dr. G.

The HPV vaccine is a must before you are sexually active. However, if you haven't had the vaccine there are measures you can take, ask your dentist. "It's not worth the risk," concludes Glassman.

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DR. GARY GLASSMAN

