

# Mouth Matters

Dorion on Dentistry

## Seal Your Lips!



Did you know that two out of three skin cancers occur in the head and neck areas, and that over-exposure to sunlight is the main cause? Lip cancer is the most common form of oral cancer, but unfortunately it often goes undiagnosed being mistaken for a cold sore or chapped

**Lip cancer is the most common form of oral cancer.**

skin. A trip to the dentist can be life saving if lip cancer is identified in its early stages since early detection promises a 90% survival rate. If

diagnosed late, the likelihood of survival drops down to 50%.

Lip cancer is strongly associated with exposure to sunlight, and especially through outdoor occupations or sports. The fact that it's more common in Newfoundland and on the Prairies than in Ontario makes sense in light of the fact that fishermen and farmers get more cumulated sun exposure than industrial workers. Thirty percent of lip cancer diagnoses are in people with outdoor occupations. If you work outside and smoke too, your risk is even higher yet.

Lip cancer is most often found in men over the age of 45. In fact men are four times more likely than women to be affected. While occupational exposure accounts for some of this difference (since men are more likely to have outdoor occupations than women) there is another factor that reduces the risk for women – lip stick!

According to a study done at the USC School of Medicine in Los Angeles, the use of lipstick or other sun blocking lip balms among women substantially reduces their risk of getting lip cancer.

A trip to the beach these days

would indicate that we are getting the message about sun protection as we see parents lathering their kids from head to toe with sunscreen. Our community public health departments and the media have been instrumental in educating people about the link between sun exposure and skin cancer. Unfortunately we all too often forget to protect the lips which are highly vulnerable to sun damage.

The standard recommendation for sunscreen lip balm is SPF 15 or higher. However, for people who work outdoors, the Canadian Dermatology Association recommends an SPF of 30 or higher. It's critical not only that you apply an SPF to your lips, but also that you reapply it frequently. While many sunscreens on the market today are waterproof and last for hours, lip balm wears off more easily.

Here are some tips on applying lip protection. Dry your lips before applying the sunscreen and apply it 30 minutes before going out in the sun if possible. Remember that clouds don't block UV radiation so lips need protection year round, especially on the water or ski slopes. The sun is most intense between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. so limit your exposure during this time if you can.

While prevention is always better than attempting a cure, we know we can't prevent all cases of lip cancer. Dentists see patients on a regular basis so are in an excellent position to monitor lip changes and provide important lip protection advice. If you develop an ulcer or wart-like growth that does not heal within a couple weeks or if you notice an abnormal redness and thickening of the lip, consult your dentist – it could save your life.

Yours for better dental health,

*Rae Dorion, DDS*

64154998

**Image Dental Arts**  
FAMILY & COSMETIC DENTISTRY

*Your image is your smile!*

Dorion Dentistry Professional Corp.

Dr. Rae Dorion  
Dr. Lee Deimling  
Dr. Jennifer Gurney-Ozog  
Dr. Andrei Ionescu

25 King George Road, Brantford, ON 519-753-7342