Scientists warn dental x-rays increase cancer risk

Dental x-rays can increase the risk of thyroid cancer, according to scientists in a new study

A research team from Brighton and Cambridge and Kuwait studied 513 thyroid cancer patients in Kuwait where the numbers of thyroid cancer are relatively high compared with Britain.

The researchers asked the cancer patients and a similar number of healthy volunteers how many dental x-rays they had had. After factoring in hospital x-rays, they found that men and women who had had up to four dental x-rays were more than twice as likely to have developed the disease than those who had never had any. Between five and nine x-rays and their risk rose more than four-fold.

However, the researchers warned that the results of their study ‘should be treated with caution’ because the data was based on self-reporting by the participants as comprehensive historical dental x-ray records were not available from the clinics. The researchers are now calling for further investigation as currently guidelines state that low-dose radiation exposure through dental radiography is safe.

Dr Anjum Memon, senior lecturer and consultant in public health medicine at Brighton and Sussex Medical School, who led the study, said: “The public health and clinical implications of these findings are particularly relevant in the light of increases in the incidence of thyroid cancer in many countries over the past 50 years. It is important that our study is repeated with information from dental records in clinical practice to make their decisions and ensure that unnecessary x-rays are not taken. Dentists are fully trained in radiography and undergo regular training to ensure their skills remain up to date.”

The incidence rates of thyroid cancer have doubled from 1.4 per 100,000 in 1975 to 2.9 per 100,000 in 2008 in the UK. The team has linked this to more and more patients having dental x-rays.

However, the researchers say that many other factors can also be causing the increase in thyroid cancer cases. The sensitive diagnostic techniques cannot solely be blamed. To confirm the exact effect of such techniques on cancer, further research is required. The study was published in the medical journal Acta Oncologica.

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**News in Brief**

**Recession prevents check-ups**

People have stopped visiting the dentist for regular check-ups due to the recession, according to a new survey. The survey conducted by the British Dental Health Foundation as part of National Smile Month, highlighted a number of reasons as to why people do not have regular check-ups. Half of people in the survey blamed it on money troubles above dental phobias and not having an NHS dentist. Chief executive of the Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter said: “This really highlights how the recession has impacted people over the last few years. Members of the public have had to sacrifice good oral healthcare to get by financially, and that is really sad. People need to have access to a dentist!” The survey found that 11 per cent do not have regular check-ups because they do not have an NHS dentist.

**Sonicare for Kids**

During National Smile Month, £1 for every Sonicare for Kids sold is being donated to the British Dental Health Foundation to support the campaign. This year the BDHF is urging parents to help their children realise the importance of learning a good oral health routine at a young age so they can keep their mouths healthy for life. The Sonicare for toothbrush has been specifically designed to help kids build healthy brushing habits for life. The Smile Month promotion was launched at the BDA Conference in Liverpool on 20 May and as a part of its sale of Sonicare For Kids during the show a cheque for £217 was presented to Dr Nigel Carter – how this was only the start and Philips aims to send a further cheque to the BDHF after the closing date as a result of sales they achieve during the month.

**Walk for cancer**

1000 places are up for grabs in the 5th annual FREE Mouth Cancer Foundation 10K. Awareness Walk, which is launched today, The walk is designed to increase awareness of mouth cancer, celebrate survivorship and remember lost dear ones while having a fun day out with family and friends. The Mouth Cancer Foundation organises the event which takes place at 15:00 on Saturday 18th September 2010, in Kensington Gardens, London and this year they are challenging 1000 people to walk the 15,000 steps it takes to complete a 10k course in order to raise much needed funds and awareness to combat mouth cancer. To take part in the FREE Mouth Cancer Foundation 10K. Awareness Walk visit www.mouthcancerrwalk.org

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