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 515 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.

Dentist 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 order to develop recommendations for the future.

Dental x-rays may have to be reconsidered, He added: ‘Our study highlights the concern that like chest (or upper body) x-rays, dental x-rays should be prescribed when the patient has a specific clinical need, and not as part of routine check-up or when registering with a dentist.

The notion that low-dose radiographic exposure through dental radiography is absolutely safe needs to be investigated further, as although the individual risk, particularly with modern equipment is likely to be very small, the proportion of the population exposed is high.’

Dr Memon claimed the findings were consistent with previous reports of increased risk of thyroid cancer in dentists, dental assistants and x-ray workers, suggesting multiple low-dose exposures in adults may be important.

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 was conducted by the British Dental Health Foundation as part of National Smile Month, highlighting 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 phobia 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 unfair. 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 Smiles for Schools promotion was launched at the BDA Conference in Liverpool on 20 May and as a result of sales of Sonicare for Kids during the show a cheque for £217 was presented to Dr Nigel Carter – however 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 this June. To enter a registration form visit www.mouthcancerwalk.org or call 01268 541322.

The Mouth Cancer Foundation organises the event which takes place at 13.00 on Saturday 18th September 2010, in Kensington Gardens, London and this year they are charging 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.mouthcancerwalk.org

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