



[cancer.org](http://cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345

---

# Salivary Gland Cancer Causes, Risk Factors, and Prevention

Learn about the risk factors for salivary gland cancer and what you might be able to do to help lower your risk.

## Risk Factors

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease such as cancer. Learn more about the risk factors for salivary gland cancer.

- [Risk Factors for Salivary Gland Cancer](#)
- [What Causes Salivary Gland Cancer?](#)

## Prevention

There is no sure way to prevent salivary gland cancer. But there are things you can do that might lower your risk. Learn more.

- [Can Salivary Gland Cancer Be Prevented?](#)

---

# Risk Factors for Salivary Gland Cancer

- [Older age](#)
- [Radiation exposure](#)

- [Smoking](#)
- [Other possible risk factors](#)

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease such as cancer. Different cancers have different risk factors. Some risk factors, like smoking, can be changed; others, like a person's age or family history, can't.

But having a risk factor, or even many, does not mean that you will get the disease. And many people who get the disease may have few or no known risk factors.

A few risk factors are known to make a person more likely to develop salivary gland cancer, but most salivary gland cancers start without any clear cause.

## **Older age**

The risk of salivary gland cancer goes up as people get older.

## **Radiation exposure**

Radiation treatment to the head and neck area for other medical reasons increases your risk of salivary gland cancer, especially if your salivary glands were not protected during the radiation.

Workplace exposure to certain radioactive substances may also increase the risk of salivary gland cancer.

## **Smoking**

Smoking cigarettes has been linked to a higher risk of Warthin tumor, a benign salivary gland tumor, but not other types of salivary gland cancers.

## **Other possible risk factors**

### **Certain workplace exposures**

Some studies have suggested that people who work with certain metals (nickel alloy dust) or minerals (silica dust), and people who work in asbestos mining, plumbing, rubber products manufacturing, and some types of woodworking may be at increased

risk for salivary gland cancer, but these links are not certain. The rarity of these cancers makes this hard to study.

### **Viral infections**

Some viral infections might be associated with certain salivary gland tumors.

Certain high-risk types of [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#)<sup>1</sup> has been found in some [mucoepidermoid cancers](#)<sup>2</sup>, but more studies are needed to say for sure if there is a link. [Vaccines](#)<sup>3</sup> to help prevent HPV infection are available and can help prevent six types of HPV-related cancers.

People with [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#)<sup>4</sup> are also at risk for salivary gland



## **What Causes Salivary Gland Cancer?**



---

# **Can Salivary Gland Cancer Be Prevented?**

## **Avoid exposure to certain infections**

Certain viral infections, such as Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and human papillomavirus (HPV), might be linked to an increased risk of salivary gland cancers. Avoiding exposure to these viruses might help lower your risk. And although more research is needed to understand finding HPV in some salivary gland cancers, there are \_\_\_\_\_

**Written by**

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team  
(<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html>)

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as editors and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

American Cancer Society medical information is copyrighted material. For reprint requests, please see our Content Usage Policy ([www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html](http://www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html)).

**cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345**