

PRESS RELEASE No. 321

18 October 2022

IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention Volume 19: Oral Cancer Prevention

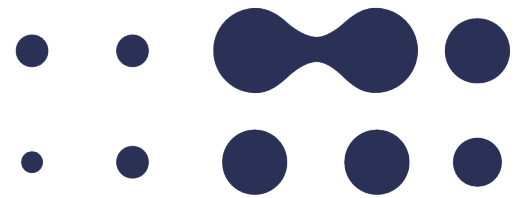
Lyon, France, 18 October 2022 – A Working Group of international experts was convened by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) to review and assess all available evidence on the effectiveness of primary and secondary preventive interventions in reducing the incidence of and mortality from oral cancer.

A Special Report published today in *The New England Journal of Medicine*¹ summarizes the studies reviewed and presents the conclusions of the Working Group. The detailed assessments will be published as Volume 19 of the *IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention*.

“This *IARC Handbook* provides a first-time evaluation of primary and secondary prevention of oral cancer,” says Dr Béatrice Lauby-Secretan, Deputy Head of the Evidence Synthesis and Classification Branch at IARC and a co-author of the report. “The Working Group evaluated: interventions for quitting use of smokeless tobacco and areca nut products; the benefits of quitting use of these products, quitting tobacco smoking, and quitting alcohol consumption; and the effectiveness of current oral cancer screening methods. The Working Group also reviewed the implementation of bans on sale and other policies to control the use of smokeless tobacco and areca nut products. This work thus contributes to IARC’s mission to serve low- and middle-income countries.”

In 2020, cancer of the lip and oral cavity was estimated to rank 16th in incidence and mortality worldwide and was a common cause of cancer death in men across much of South and South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. Risk factors for oral cancer are dominated by use of tobacco, both smoked and smokeless, and alcohol consumption. In South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Islands, where oral cancer is highly prevalent, the major risk factors are use of smokeless tobacco and areca nut products. A small proportion of oral cancer cases globally (~2%) is caused by infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), primarily HPV16.

¹ Bouvard V, Nethan ST, Singh D, Warnakulasuriya S, Mehrotra R, Chaturvedi AK, et al. (2022). The IARC perspective on oral cancer prevention. *N Engl J Med*. Published online 18 October 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMs2210097>



Based on the evidence reviewed, the Working Group concluded that there is *sufficient evidence* that quitting tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, or use of areca nut products (with or without tobacco) reduces the elevated risk of oral cancer associated with exposure to the risk factor. Among the various interventions for quitting use of smokeless tobacco and areca nut products (with or without tobacco), there is *sufficient evidence* that behavioural interventions in adults are effective in inducing quitting use of smokeless tobacco. In addition, with regard to secondary prevention, the Working Group concluded that screening of high-risk populations by clinical oral examination may reduce mortality from oral cancer.

“This volume of the *IARC Handbooks* will play a major role in the regulation of smokeless tobacco in the South-East Asia region and will help fight a major public health problem,” says Professor Saman Warnakulasuriya, Emeritus Professor at King’s College London, a Working Group Co-Chair and a co-author of the report. “In addition, it fits into the World Health Organization (WHO) mission of tobacco control, feeding into the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC),” says Professor Ravi Mehrotra, former Head of the WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub on Smokeless Tobacco, a Working Group Co-Chair and a co-author of the report.

Note to Editors

The *IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention* provide evaluations of the cancer-preventive potential of strategies and interventions. Each volume is produced by an international Working Group of experts. The series was relaunched in 2014 with a reassessment of breast cancer screening.

The *IARC Handbooks* use a classification system based on strict and transparent criteria. For reference, see the two evaluation schemes: <https://www.iarc.who.int/infographics/iarc-handbooks-evaluations-of-primary-prevention/> and <https://www.iarc.who.int/infographics/iarc-handbooks-evaluations-of-secondary-prevention/>.

For more on the *IARC Handbooks*, see <https://handbooks.iarc.fr/>.

For more information, please contact

Véronique Terrasse, Communications Team, at +33 (0)6 45 28 49 52 or terrassev@iarc.fr
or IARC Communications, at com@iarc.fr

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release emailing list, please write to com@iarc.fr.