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New cigarette plain packaging will help highlight poorly understood link between smoking and oral cancer

The advent of plain packaging will further highlight the dangers of smoking and cast attention on some of the lesser-known but potentially deadly effects of smoking such as oral cancer, the Oral Health CRC said today.

Professor Mike Morgan, Colgate Chair of Population Oral Health, Melbourne Dental School and Program Leader at the Oral Health CRC at the University of Melbourne welcomes the world's first cigarette plain packaging legislation coming into effect on 1 December.

From Saturday all cigarettes in Australia will be sold in plain packaging with the health warnings and graphic photographs increasing in size from 30 to 75 per cent of the package.

“We have a clear responsibility to inform the Australian community about the disastrous effects that smoking has on all aspects of health – and this includes the role that tobacco has in causing oral cancers, throat cancers and periodontal (gum) diseases,” Professor Morgan said.

Oral cancers and damage to the gums and teeth will feature in the graphic photographs on the new packaging.

A report from the Cancer Council Victoria released today found that only one in ten smokers could link throat cancer and mouth cancer with smoking.

“Unfortunately, smoking cigarettes is one of the best ways to produce oral and throat cancers and it increase our risks to other oral diseases such as periodontal (gum) diseases,” he said.

Oral cancer is one of the world's most common cancers, with over 900 new intraoral carcinoma cases registered in Australia each year - approximately 6.5 per cent of all cancers diagnosed in Australia. Oral cancer can affect the tongue, lips, cheeks and soft palate of the mouth.

The Oral Health CRC is investigating the changes that occur in the mouth during the onset of oral cancers and gaining information on the role of risk factors such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and alcohol.

“By better understanding the disease, the Oral Health CRC aims to develop a diagnostic tool which will enable early identification of oral cancers and lead to improved treatment options for patients,” Professor Morgan said.

“Oral and throat cancers together with periodontal (gum) diseases represent an enormous human and dollar cost to the Australian community. Quitting smoking or not starting in the first place, will reduce this cost to our population and improve our health dramatically.”

For further comment on the effects of smoking on oral health and the new plain packaging legislation please contact Genevieve Costigan, Communications Manager, Oral Health CRC on 0421 956 036 or Professor Mike Morgan directly on 0414 872 392.