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Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 10/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net?s Guide to Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread.

Adenoid cystic carcinoma (AdCC) is a rare form of adenocarcinoma, which is a broad term describing any cancer that begins in glandular tissues. AdCC is found mainly in the head and neck, but it can occasionally occur in a woman?s uterus or other locations in the body. AdCC most commonly occurs in the salivary glands, which consist of clusters of cells that secrete saliva scattered throughout the upper aerodigestive tract. The upper aerodigestive includes the organs and tissues of the upper respiratory tract, such as the lips, mouth, tongue, nose, throat, vocal cords, and part of the esophagus and windpipe. A tumor may begin in the:

- Minor salivary glands
  - Palate ? roof of the mouth
  - Nasopharynx ? an air passageway at the upper part of the throat and behind the nose
  - Tongue base ? the back third of the tongue
  - Mucosal lining of the mouth ? the inner lining of the mouth; glands located here produce mucus
  - Larynx ? the voice box
  - Trachea ? the windpipe
- Major salivary glands
  - Parotid ? the largest salivary gland found on either side of the face in front of each ear
  - Submandibular ? found under the jawbone
  - Sublingual glands ? located in the bottom of the mouth under the tongue

Regardless of where it starts, AdCC tends to spread along nerves, known as a perineural invasion, or through the bloodstream. It spreads to the lymph nodes in only about 5% to 10% of cases. The most common place of metastases, which is the spread of cancer to another part of the body, is the lung. AdCC is known for having long periods of no growth, or indolence, followed

by growth spurts. However, AdCC can behave aggressively in some people, making the course of the AdCC unpredictable.

Besides being classified based on where the cancer begins, AdCC is also described based on the histologic variations of the tumor, meaning what tumor cells look like under a microscope. The tumor can be classified as cylindroma, cribiform, or solid AdCC. AdCC is sometimes classified as a disease of the minor salivary gland, even though it may begin at other sites.

This section covers AdCC. Learn more about other head and neck cancers [3].

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/adenoid-cystic-carcinoma/overview
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/31296