

The dangers of...

# Betel Nut

Provider Guide

## The Importance of Screening for Betel (Areca) Nut Use

### Did you know?

- ➔ Betel nut is classified as a **human carcinogen** by the WHO.
- ➔ Betel nut can be **addictive**. Regular use may lead to dependency and withdrawal symptoms.
- ➔ It has potentially **serious adverse health effects**.
- ➔ Betel nut is commonly used with **smokeless tobacco**.
- ➔ **10%-20% of the world's population uses it**. Prevalence may be as high as **50% in some communities in Burma**. It is one of the most widely consumed substances in the world, after nicotine, alcohol and caffeine.
- ➔ Betel nut may be particularly dangerous for **pregnant women**.
- ➔ In some countries, chewing betel nut is a **cultural and social practice** among adults, pregnant women and children.
- ➔ Betel nut is **readily available** in Orange County.



Photo credit: Island Chronicles

### What is betel nut?

Betel nut is the seed of an areca palm that grows in tropical parts of the Pacific, Asia and eastern Africa. It is said to have both stimulant and relaxation effects and is often used as a digestive aid or to sweeten breath.

### How is it used?

It can be chewed alone, but is most commonly used as "**betel quid**" (a mixture of thinly sliced areca nut, tobacco, slaked lime, and spices or flavorings, wrapped in a leaf.) It is placed in between the tongue and cheek. When it has been thoroughly chewed, the user spits it out.

### Who's at risk of chewing betel nut?

Immigrants/Refugees from South and Southeast Asia (e.g., *Burma, Thailand, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam*), parts of East Africa and the tropical Pacific.

### How can I tell if someone is chewing betel nut?

People who regularly chew betel nut will have teeth that are stained red or black.



Photo credit: BBC Science Photo Library

### Why it's important to talk to your patients about betel nut.

Some people do not understand the health risks associated with betel nut use and have not had the opportunity to explore cessation options, alternatives, or ways to minimize health risks.

# Adverse Health Effects of Betel Nut Use



## Oral Health

Betel nut can cause “Chewers Mucosa” (brown-red staining of oral mucosa), leukoplakia, erythroplakia, oral submucous fibrosis, and is associated with more severe periodontal disease.

## Cancer

Chewing betel nut, with and without tobacco, is carcinogenic.

Betel nut can cause precancerous lesions with a high propensity to progress. These can appear as red or white patches in the mouth or throat.

When chewed with tobacco, the risks for oral cancer, cancer of the pharynx, and esophageal cancer greatly increase.

## Pregnancy Complications

Betel nut may increase the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes. Dual use with tobacco can introduce additional complications including low birth weight and preterm babies.



## What Healthcare Providers Can Do

**Screen patients** for betel nut use and note response in patient records.

**Discuss the adverse health effects** of chewing betel nut.

Refer patients who chew betel nut with tobacco to the **Quitline, 1-800-QUIT-NOW or QuitlineNC.com.**

*\*They have access to interpreters.*

Use motivational interview techniques to **explore** culturally and socially appropriate **alternatives** to betel nut.

Ensure patients receive regular care from a **dentist** for clinical management, self-care education, and oral cancer screenings. The Health Department’s betel nut page has more detailed information for dentists and hygienists.



### Sample Screening Questions

- Have you ever chewed betel nut?*
- Do you currently chew betel nut? If so, how often?*
- Are you aware of the negative health impacts of chewing betel nut?*
- Do you have a dentist?*

**Note:** The FDA is developing an Import Alert for refusal of admission of areca nuts, and food containing the nut, offered for import into the US due to the WHO classification as a carcinogen.

Visit our betel nut webpage for information and related links.

[http://www.orangecountync.gov/departments/health/betel\\_nut.php](http://www.orangecountync.gov/departments/health/betel_nut.php)