Eddie Van Halen Has Died of Throat Cancer

The rock star had famously blamed his cancer on his habit of holding metal guitar picks in his mouth but was also a heavy smoker.

October 6, 2020 By Bob Barnett

Eddie Van Halen, the legendary guitarist and rock star whose band, Van Halen, sold more than 56 million albums over five decades, died of throat cancer at age 65, today, reports TMZ.

“I can’t believe I’m having to write this, but my father, Edward Lodewijk Van Halen, has lost his long and arduous battle with cancer this morning,” tweeted his son, Wolfgang Van Halen. “He was the best father I could ever ask for. Every moment I’ve shared with him on and off stage was a gift.... I love you so much, Pop.

pic.twitter.com/kQqDV7pulR

— Wolf Van Halen (@WolfVanHalen) October 6, 2020

The Los Angeles Times described Van Halen as “an all-American guitar hero who, with his namesake hard-rock band Van Halen, redefined the sound and possibilities of the electric guitar in the 1970s and ‘80s.”

“I just heard about Eddie Van Halen and I feel terrible about it,” tweeted Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys. “Eddie was such a great guitarist and I remember how big Van Halen was, especially here in L.A. Love and Mercy to Eddie’s family & friends.”

I just heard about Eddie Van Halen and I feel terrible about it. Eddie was such a great guitarist and I remember how big Van Halen was, especially here in

L.A. Love and Mercy to Eddie’s family & friends.

pic.twitter.com/PY8fyrx1Lu

— Brian Wilson (@BrianWilsonLive) October 6, 2020

“Heaven will be electric tonight,” tweeted Lenny Kravitz.

Legendary guitar and musical innovator Edward Van Halen. 1955-2020. Heaven will be electric tonight.

pic.twitter.com/hdLd7atI74

— Lenny Kravitz (@LennyKravitz) October 6, 2020

“My heart is broken,” tweeted Gene Simmons, of the band Kiss. “Eddie was not only a Guitar God, but a genuinely beautiful soul. Rest in peace, Eddie!”

My heart is broken. Eddie was not only a Guitar God, but a genuinely beautiful soul. Rest in peace, Eddie! ...Eddie Van Halen Dead at 65 from Cancer

https://t.co/glTtcndQVv

— Gene Simmons (@genesimmons) October 6, 2020

Van Halen was diagnosed with mouth cancer in 2000 and had tongue surgery. He was later diagnosed with throat cancer and reportedly had been receiving radiation treatment in Germany. He famously blamed both cancers on his habit of holding brass and copper electric guitar picks in his mouth, “in the exact place where I got the tongue cancer,” he told Billboard in 2015. But experts pointed out that his heavy smoking, as well as his drug and alcohol use, might have played a more significant role.

One aspect of his death, however, is without controversy: American music has lost a bright star.

“Eddie Van Halen’s high-flying guitar sound—heavy on tapping, with both hands on the neck of the instrument—was deeply influential, but also hard to imitate,” according to NPR.

Variety spotlighted Van Halen’s virtuosic solo in the song “Eruption,” from his self-titled 1978 debut solo album. “In a mere one minute and 42 seconds, the axe man detonated a dazzling display of fretboard tapping, ringing harmonics, lightning-fast licks and smeared, dive-bombing effects. Writing about that recording in Rolling Stone’s 2015 poll of the 100 greatest guitarists—in which Van Halen placed eighth, between Duane Allman and Chuck Berry—Mike McCready of Pearl Jam wrote, ‘It sounded like it came from another planet… [I]t was glorious, like hearing Mozart for the first time.’”

For more on celebrities and cancer, click here. To learn more about throat cancer, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/Eddie-Van-Halen-dies-throat-cancer