



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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January is Cervical Health Awareness and Cancer Screening Month; free cervical cancer and breast cancer screening available

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Early detection and prompt treatment can significantly reduce the suffering and deaths caused by cervical cancer. However, many women in Alabama's rural communities do not participate in routine screening. Chances of survival are better than ever and the earlier the cause is detected the better the chance of survival...the best protection is early detection.

Since the most common form of cervical cancer starts with precancerous changes, there are three ways to stop this disease from developing. The first way is to prevent the precancers. Women can prevent most precancers of the cervix by avoiding exposure to human papillomavirus, HPV. HPV infection is the major cause of cervical cancer in women. Delaying having sexual intercourse at a young age can help women avoid HPV.

The second way to prevent cervical cancer is to have testing (including a pap test) to detect HPV and precancers. Treatment can stop cervical cancer before it is fully developed. Most invasive cervical cancers are found in women who have not had regular pap tests.

The third way is through immunization with a new vaccine, Gardasil. This is the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer, precancerous genital lesions and genital warts due to HPV. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends routine vaccination for girls 11-12 years of age. The ACIP recommendation also allows for vaccination of girls beginning at 9 years old as well as vaccination of girls and women 13-26 years old. The vaccine protects against four types of HPV, including two that cause about 70 percent of cervical cancer.

The Alabama Department of Public Health encourages age-appropriate girls and women to seek the advice of their personal physician regarding the HPV vaccine.

For now, the important way to improve early detection of cervical cancer is to make certain that all women are tested. While the Department of Public Health currently does not offer the new HPV vaccine, the Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Detection Program (ABCCEDP), coordinated by the Alabama Department of Public Health, offers FREE cervical and breast cancer screenings to women who qualify.

Services are available primarily to women 40 and older who are uninsured or underinsured and who are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (income level for a family of two is \$26,400 annually).

Services offered through this program include pelvic exams, pap smear screening, breast exam/education, and mammograms (50 and older, unless patient is experiencing breast problems). Cancer screening services are available either through participating local physicians or local county health departments.

Please call today for your appointment. For additional information and to determine if you are eligible please call, toll free: 1-877-252-3324.

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