



MEDIA RELEASE 1-18-12

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Early detection vital to surviving cervical cancer

Stanton, MI~ According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 12,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, of which nearly 4,000 do not survive. In Michigan, those numbers translate to over 400 annual diagnoses and 150 needless deaths.

Cervical cancer, the second-most common type of cancer (behind breast cancer), is typically slow-growing and often has no symptoms, but can be easily found with a Pap test. For this reason, Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), is reminding women of the importance of a regular Pap test to screen for this deadly but curable disease.

According to Dr. Graham a Pap test is truly a life saver.

“A Pap test is such an important part of a woman’s regular health care routine because it can detect cancer or abnormalities that may lead to cancer of the cervix,” said Dr. Graham. “In fact, health care providers can often remove abnormal cervical tissue before it develops into cancer.”

According to Graham, no one should die from cervical cancer. “It’s nearly one hundred percent preventable, and a cancer that, if diagnosed early, can be easily cured,” he said.

Graham recommends regular Pap tests and exams for women beginning at age 21 or three years after the onset of sexual activity, whichever occurs first.

When it comes to receiving a Pap test, it’s important to note that several options are available. While a Pap test is normally obtained through a woman’s primary care provider, those under 40 years of age can also receive a Pap test through MMDHDs Family Planning clinic, regardless of income.

Clinton and Gratiot county women, age 50 to 64, who are without health insurance, may be eligible to receive a Pap test through the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP). This program offers free Pap smears, mammograms, breast exams, and pelvic exams for eligible women. For more information, to see if you qualify, or to schedule an appointment, please contact MMDHD at 989-227-3117 in Clinton County and 989-875-1014 in Gratiot County. If you live outside these counties, call 1-800-922-6266 to locate a program near you.

While the cause of cancer in general still remains somewhat of a mystery, the cause of cervical cancer does not. The culprit is almost always the human papilloma virus (HPV) infection, the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States.

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Luckily, women are no longer unarmed against this deadly invader. Two vaccines (Cervarix and Gardasil) are now available to protect women against the types of HPV that cause 70% of cervical cancers. Vaccination is recommended for 11 and 12 year-old girls and females 13 to 26 who did not receive any or all three recommended doses when they were younger.

To learn more about cervical cancer or the HPV vaccine, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at www.cdc.gov or the National Cervical Cancer Coalition's website at www.nccc-online.org.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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