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Early detection vital to surviving cervical cancer

ITHACA/STANTON/ST. JOHNS, MI~ According to the American Cancer Society an estimated 11,150 new cases of cervical cancer will be diagnosed in 2009, of which an estimated 33 percent will die.

For this reason Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), is reminding women of the importance of a Pap test to screen for cervical cancer.

A Pap test is an important part of a woman's health care routine because it can detect cancer or abnormalities that may lead to cancer of the cervix. Most cervical cancers are slow-growing and develop over a long period of time. During this time, abnormal cervical tissue can be detected by a Pap test and then removed by a health care provider before the tissue develops into cancer.

"This test can be a real lifesaver," said Dr. Graham. "No one should die from cervical cancer. It is a cancer that, if diagnosed early, can be easily cured. Pick up the phone and make an appointment with your health-care provider today."

The Michigan Department of Community Health recommends Pap tests and exams for women beginning at age 21 or three years after the onset of sexual activity, whichever occurs first.

For women who may have limited access to health care, the health department offers a program through the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) called the Breast & Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP), which provides free breast exams, mammograms, pelvic exams and Pap tests to women age 40 to 64 who meet income and insurance guidelines. Income guidelines range from an annual income of \$25,525 for a one-person family to \$51,625 for a four-person family.

"If you have not had a Pap smear in the last year, visit your health-care provider, or if you don't have insurance, please call the health department to see if you qualify for this special program," said Dr. Graham.

It is also recommended that girls 11 to 13 years of age receive the FDA approved Gardasil vaccine, which is believed to prevent up to 70 percent of cervical cancers.

For more information on the Gardasil vaccine, please visit www.michigancancer.org/bcccp. For more information on the BCCCP please call the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at 989-831-5237 in Montcalm County, 989-875-3681 in Gratiot County, 989-224-2195 in Clinton County or visit www.mmdhd.org.

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