



Charlie Crist
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THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES JANUARY AS CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Health (DOH) recognizes January as Cervical Health Awareness Month, a time to educate, encourage and empower women to visit their health care provider for information and screening for cervical cancer.

“Because approximately half of all cervical cancers occur in women who have never been screened, screening is particularly important in these women or women who have rarely been screened,” said Susan Fleming, DOH Cancer Program Administrator. “By taking action, you can reduce your cancer risk.”

Cervical cancer once claimed the lives of more American women than any other type of cancer but is now nearly 100% preventable and treatable with timely interventions. Over the last 40 years, widespread cervical cancer screening using the Pap test and treatment of pre-cancerous cervical conditions have resulted in a marked reduction of the incidence and deaths due to cervical cancer in the United States.

Approximately 99 percent of cervical cancer is attributed to a virus known as human papillomavirus (HPV). The virus is spread through sexual contact, and women can be infected with HPV and not know it. A new HPV vaccine prevents some types of cervical cancer. This immunization may reduce the incidence of cervical cancer even more over time.

Ways to prevent or treat cervical cancer include:

- Have regular Pap tests which can find early cell changes in the cervix
- Females should start getting regular Pap tests about three years after they begin sexual activity
- All women should have a Pap test by the age of 21 regardless of sexual activity
- Follow up promptly on any abnormal Pap test results
- Discuss HPV vaccinations with your health care provider

Studies also suggest that smoking, a weakened immune system, and multiple sexual partners increase your risk of cervical cancer.

In Florida during 2005, 910 new cases of cervical cancer were diagnosed, and 291 Floridians died of cervical cancer. The number of cases and deaths are higher in Florida than many other states.

DOH promotes, protects and improves the health of all people in Florida. The DOH Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program is available statewide. This program provides assistance to women ages 50-64, who are uninsured and are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. By offering information and support, as well as the critical screening services that women need, the program has helped to remove barriers that prevent women from being screened. Since the program began, over 44,189 women have received Pap tests through this program. There are 16 sites in Florida that serve the state. For more information on



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enrolling in the Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, visit www.doh.state.fl.us/family/bcc or call the American Cancer Society at (800) 227-2345.

To learn more about cervical cancer, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov, the American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org, the National Cancer Institute at www.cancer.gov, or the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality at www.ahrq.gov. A Florida cervical cancer fact sheet is available at www.doh.state.fl.us/Disease_ctrl/epi/cancer/Cervix_Report.pdf.

The DOH Immunization Program provides vaccinations for HPV to young females through several programs. You can visit www.immunizeflorida.org/topics/hpv.htm for more information or call your local county health department.

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