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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 4,000 do not survive. In Michigan, those numbers translate to over 300 annual diagnoses and 110 deaths.

Cervical cancer often has no symptoms, but can be easily detected with a Pap test. Unfortunately, most invasive cervical cancers are found in women who have not had regular pap tests. 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.

“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. “Oftentimes abnormal cervical tissue can be removed before it develops into cancer.”

According to Graham, cervical cancer is 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 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. To make an appointment, call 989-224-2195 in Clinton County, 989-875-3681 in Gratiot County and 989-831-5237 in Montcalm County.

Clinton and Gratiot county women, age 40 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 some types of cancers remains 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 American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org.

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

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