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FLORIDA HEALTH IN LEE COUNTY ENCOURAGES REGULAR SCREENING FOR CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION



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[Fort Myers, Fla.] — January is Cervical Health Awareness Month and Florida Health in Lee encourages women to visit their health care provider to be screened for cervical cancer and learn more about preventing cervical cancer through lifestyle change and vaccination.

“We must increase our efforts to make sure that all women understand the importance of getting screened for cervical cancer,” says Angela Smith, Administrator, Florida Department of Health in Lee County. “We know cervical cancer can be prevented with proper screening to find pre-cancerous conditions before they develop into invasive cancer. Screenings save lives.”

As of 2015, cervical cancer, or cancer starting in the cervix, is the 15th leading cause of cancer deaths among women in Florida. Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to another during sexual activity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cervical cancer is the easiest gynecologic cancer to prevent, with regular screening tests and follow-up.

According to CDC, to reduce risk or prevent cervical cancer women should:

- Get the HPV vaccine between ages 9 and 26;
- See their health care provider regularly for a Pap test between ages 21 and 65;
- Not smoke; and
- Limit the number of sexual partners.

Completing the three dose HPV vaccination series can help prevent multiple cancers, including cervical cancer and cancer of the mouth and throat. The department’s Immunization Section provides vaccinations for HPV through several programs.

Two screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early:

- The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancers, cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately.
- The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes.

Talk to your health care provider about when a Pap test is most appropriate for you. Tests for specific HPV strains can support earlier diagnosis of cervical cancer. Women ages 50-64, who

are uninsured and are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level can receive Pap tests through the department's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. Learn more about the Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/cancer/breast-cancer/bccedp.html>.

Learn more about the HPV Vaccine at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/vaccines/hpv.html>

To learn more about the department's Immunization Section at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/immunization/> or contact your county health department.

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