Michigan Recognizes January as National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

To raise awareness about the seriousness of cervical cancer, the Central Michigan District Health Department (CMDHD) is recognizing January as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month.

“It is extremely important for women to have a Pap test regularly to prevent cervical cancer,” said Mary Kushion, CMDHD Health Officer. “Cervical cancer often does not have any symptoms and regular screenings has helped reduce the number of deaths nationally by 70 percent.”

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 easily by a Pap test and then removed by a health care provider before the tissue develops into cancer.

In 2005, 123 women in Michigan died from cervical cancer — up from 104 women in 2003. The primary cause of cervical cancer is the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. In June 2006, the FDA approved a vaccine that prevents against two strains of HPV that are responsible for 70 percent of all cervical cancers. This vaccine is recommended for females age 11 to 26 and is available at CMDHD. Another similar vaccine is pending FDA approval.

The Michigan Cancer Consortium recommends regular Pap testing and speculum exams for women beginning at age 21 or three years after the onset of sexual activity, whichever occurs first. Women under age 40 may obtain Pap testing through their health care provider at Family Planning clinics available through local health departments or at Planned Parenthood of Michigan affiliates located across the state.
Women ages 40 to 64 who are uninsured or underinsured and whose incomes are at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level may be eligible to obtain free Pap tests through the Michigan Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP). Women diagnosed with cervical cancer or pre-cancerous conditions through the BCCCP may apply for Medicaid to pay for their needed treatment. Since the BCCCP began in 1991, more than 2,700 Michigan women have been diagnosed with cervical cancer. For more information on the BCCCP, visit [www.michigancancer.org/bcccp](http://www.michigancancer.org/bcccp) or contact your local office of the CMDHD.

This article has been brought to you by the Central Michigan District Health Department which serves the counties of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola, and Roscommon.

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