



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

The Bergen County Department of Health Services, in conjunction with the Bergen County Cancer Coalition, encourages women to start the year by scheduling a Pap test to check for cervical cancer. This screening is a crucial part of a woman's health care regimen, yet most women diagnosed with cervical cancer have never had a Pap test or have not had one in the previous three to five years. Having a Pap test regularly is the key to preventing cancer of the cervix, the lower part of the uterus (womb) that connects the body of the uterus to the vagina (birth canal).

According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 12,710 American women will learn they have cervical cancer this year and approximately 4,290 will die from the disease. Cancer of the cervix tends to occur in midlife; most cases are found in women younger than 50. Cervical cancer rarely develops in women younger than 20. However, the risk of developing cervical cancer is still present as women age. Almost 20% of women with cervical cancer are diagnosed when they are over 65.

The most important risk factor for cervical cancer is infection by the human papilloma virus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Most people with HPV don't even know that they have it because they never experience symptoms or problems. Usually the body's immune system will fight off the infection. Sometimes an HPV infection does not go away and causes abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. If left untreated, these abnormal changes can eventually lead to cervical cancer. Other factors that could contribute to cervical cancer include multiple sex partners, multiple full-term pregnancies, sexual intercourse at an early age, Chlamydia infection, smoking, use of oral contraceptives and a weakened immune system or HIV infection.

Precancerous cervical cell changes and early cancers of the cervix generally do not cause symptoms. Abnormal or irregular vaginal bleeding, pain during sex, vaginal discharge, pelvic pain not related to a woman's menstrual cycle, increased urinary frequency or pain during urination may be symptoms of more advanced disease and should be reported to your healthcare provider.

While routine administration of Pap tests is the best means of detecting cervical cancer at an early stage, vaccines have the potential to protect women from the disease, by targeting cancer-causing types of the human papilloma virus (HPV).

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers today. If detected early, the 5-year survival rate is almost 100%.

For more information on National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, visit the website of the National Cervical Coalition (NCCC) at www.nccc-online.org/awareness.html. For more information on the Bergen County Cancer Coalition, please contact the Coordinator at 201-634-2707 or log on to www.bergenhealth.org.

The Bergen County Cancer Coalition is made possible through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services' Office of Cancer Control and Prevention. The mission of the Bergen County Cancer Coalition is to implement the New Jersey Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan in Bergen County. For more information on Comprehensive Cancer Control in New Jersey, please visit: www.njcancer.gov.