

January Cervical Health Awareness Month

Screenings and HPV Vaccination



Although cervical cancer was once the leading cancer killer of women, the number of cases has declined 75 percent in the past 50 years, largely because of the widely available and reliable Pap test. Even so, an estimated 12,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year. In 2007, 4,021 women died from cervical cancer in the United States. In 2008, 76 Kansas cases were diagnosed, with 24 deaths due to cervical cancer in 2010.

Pap tests decrease the risk of developing cervical cancer by detecting precancerous cells which, when found early, are highly treatable. Women should have their first screening Pap test at age 21, or within three years of becoming sexually active if younger.

In 2010, approximately 17 percent of Kansas women aged 18 and older did not have a Pap test within the past 3 years. Not having a Pap test is significantly more common among uninsured compared to insured women. KDHE's Early Detection Works (EDW) program provides breast and cervical cancer screening for uninsured women age 40 to 64 who meet income guidelines. For more information about EDW, call toll free 1-877-277-1368 or visit www.kdheks.gov/edw.

Most cervical cancer cases are caused by infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted disease. HPV infection can also cause a number of other health problems for both men and women. An HPV vaccine is available to prevent many of these potential health problems and is routinely recommended for both females and males at 11-12 years of age. The three dose series is to be given over a six month period. If an adolescent misses receiving the three recommended doses, they may catch up during 13-26 years of age.

For people concerned about vaccine safety, it is helpful to note that vaccines are safety tested before licensing and are continually monitored for safety and effectiveness. It is critical for adolescents to complete the three dose series well before exposure to HPV. Young teens have strong immune responses to the vaccine that will protect them for the years ahead.

Most health insurance policies cover the cost of vaccines. If an adolescent does not have an insurance plan that covers vaccines, the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program may be able to help. VFC provides vaccines at no cost to doctors who serve eligible children. Ask your doctor or contact your local health department to learn more about the VFC program, or visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/.

For more information about Kansas cancer resources and information, visit www.cancerkansas.org.