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KDHE Promotes Cancer Screenings During Cervical Health Awareness Month

Women across Kansas are encouraged to schedule a well-woman checkup this month in recognition of Cervical Health Awareness Month

Cervical cancer was once the number one cancer killer of women, but during the past 50 years the number of new cases and deaths in the United States has declined 75 percent, largely because of the widely available and reliable Pap test. Women should have their first screening Pap smear at age 21, or within three years of becoming sexually active if younger.

"The good news is cervical cancer is no longer a leading cause of death for women in the United States," said Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, State Health Officer and Director of Health for KDHE. "Pap tests decrease a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer by detecting precancerous cells which, when found early, are highly treatable."

Although the number of cervical cancer cases has declined, an estimated 4,210 women died from cervical cancer in the United States last year. In Kansas women, cervical cancer accounts for approximately two percent of all cancer, with an average of 107 new cases diagnosed each year. About 33 Kansas women die of cervical cancer annually.

"More African American and Hispanic women get cervical cancer and are diagnosed at later stages of the disease than women of other races or ethnicities, possibly because of decreased access to Pap testing or follow-up treatment," added Dr. Eberhart-Phillips. "It is important for women of all races and ethnicities to seek early detection and treatment." In Kansas, African American women die of cervical cancer at a rate twice that of white women.

The majority of cervical cancer cases are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection. Although women generally are infected with HPV in their teens, 20s, or 30s, the disease can take up to 20 years to develop. A vaccine against the strains of HPV that cause about 70 percent of cervical cancer is available. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccination for girls at age 11 or 12 years, or on a catch-up basis for females aged 13 to 26 to help prevent cervical cancer later in life. Parents are encouraged to talk with their daughter's health care provider for more information about the vaccine.

KDHE promotes cervical cancer screening for all women. KDHE's Early Detection Works program provides breast and cervical cancer screening for uninsured women age 40 to 64 who meet income guidelines through a network of contracting providers across the state. For more information about the program, visit www.preventionworkskansas.org/edw.html or call toll free 1-877-277-1368. For more

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

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As the state's environmental protection and public health agency, KDHE promotes responsible choices to protect the health and environment for all Kansans.

Through education, direct services and the assessment of data and trends, coupled with policy development and enforcement, KDHE will improve health and quality of life. We prevent illness, injuries and foster a safe and sustainable environment for the people of Kansas.