

Cervical Cancer: Your Best Protection is Early Detection

January 2009 is National Cervical Health Awareness month

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Contact: Carol Schriber, 919-733-9190

Raleigh, N.C. - Nearly 400 women in North Carolina were diagnosed with cervical cancer last year, and 124 died from the disease. African American and Hispanic women have a greater risk of developing cervical cancer than white women, and the death rate is 50 percent higher among both African American and Hispanic women.

January is Cervical Health Awareness month, and the focus is on raising awareness of the importance of prevention and screening for cervical cancer.

“When found early, cervical cancer is one of the most preventable, treatable and curable cancers,” said State Health Director Leah Devlin. A Pap test offers the best opportunity to detect cervical cancer at an early stage, when successful treatment is likely. A Pap test is a quick and simple, generally painless test that identifies abnormal cell changes in and around the cervix that can develop into cancer. Regular Pap tests can detect these changes before they have a chance to turn into cervical cancer.

Despite the success of Pap tests in detecting and preventing cervical cancer, not all women get Pap tests regularly. Minority and low-income women often have lower screening rates for cervical cancer. Low rates of screening and poor follow-up after an abnormal Pap test may contribute to the increased rates of death in these populations. It has been estimated that as many as 80 percent of deaths from cervical cancer could be prevented by regular screening and necessary treatment.

To start the year right, women are encouraged to schedule a Pap test to check for cervical cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that women who are sexually active or over the age of 21 talk their health care provider about getting screened. Cancer is treatable and curable. The best protection is early detection.

The North Carolina Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (NCBCCCCP) offers free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screening services and follow-up care to eligible women in the state of North Carolina. For more information, call 1-800-662-7030 or 919-707-5300.