



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Alabama Department of Public Health offers cervical cancer screening and treatment

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The month of January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month and the Alabama Department of Public Health encourages all women to get screened. The Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program of the Alabama Department of Public Health offers free breast and cervical screenings for women who meet program guidelines.

"Early cervical cancer generally produces no signs or symptoms. As the cancer progresses, symptoms may appear, but the best form of detection is regular Pap smears," said Brooke Thorington, public education coordinator for the program. "We want to encourage women to make it a new year's resolution to practice good cervical health."

The Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program offers free pelvic exams and pap smears as well as free clinical breast exams primarily to women ages 40 to 64 who do not have any insurance or who are underinsured and who meet the income eligibility guidelines. Women ages 50 to 64 will receive free mammograms in addition to the services mentioned above. For more information, please call toll-free at 1-877-252-3324.

The American Cancer Society estimates that at least 13,000 women in the U.S., including 200 in Alabama, will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and nearly 4,100 will die of this disease this year. Being a middle-aged woman is one risk factor for developing cervical cancer although it can affect younger women as well.

Another risk factor is the human papillomavirus, or HPV, which is a disease transmitted through sexual contact. HPV, which sometimes results in genital warts on the cervix or vagina, is a major risk factor for cervical cancer.

Smoking increases a woman's risk of cervical cancer twice as much as that of nonsmokers. Having sex at an early age, multiple sexual partners or a partner who has had many sexual partners, also increases the risk of cervical cancer.

The following are the American Cancer Society recommendations for cervical cancer screening:

Cervical cancer screening should begin about three years after a woman begins having vaginal intercourse, but no later than 21 years of age. Cervical screening should be done every year with regular Pap tests. At or after age 30, women who have had three normal test results in a row may get screened every two to three years.

A doctor may suggest getting the test more often if a woman has certain risk factors such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection or a weakened immune system. Women who smoke are about twice as likely as those who don't to get cervical cancer. Tobacco smoke can produce chemicals that may damage the DNA in cells of the cervix and make cancer more likely to occur.

According to the American Cancer Society other risk factors include:

- Multiple sex partners
- Sex at an early age
- Unprotected sex
- Chlamydia
- A diet low in fruits and vegetables
- Obesity
- Long-term use of birth control pills (five years or more)
- Many pregnancies
- Use of the drug DES (diethylstilbestrol)
- Family history of cervical cancer

Women 70 years of age and older who have had three or more normal Pap test results and no abnormal results in the last 10 years may choose to stop cervical cancer screening.

Screening after a total hysterectomy, with removal of the cervix, is usually not necessary unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer or pre-cancer. Some other special conditions may require continued screening. Women who have had a hysterectomy without removal of the cervix should continue cervical cancer screening at least until age 70.

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