



Health department provides free cervical cancer examinations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Thousands of women are dying each year unnecessarily as a result of cervical cancer. If detected early, cervical cancer is one of the most treatable cancers. During the month of January, Cervical Health Awareness Month, women of all ages are encouraged to get a regular cervical cancer screening also known as a Pap smear. Women who have never or rarely been screened (within the past five years) are urged to call their provider for a Pap smear appointment.

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women ages 18 or older or who are sexually active receive a yearly Pap smear. After three normal test results in a row, this test can be done every three years at the physician's discretion.

"All women should be aware of the importance of cervical cancer screening and early detection. A Pap smear is a simple procedure that can detect precancerous cervical cells or cervical cancer at its earliest stage," said Deborah Pennington, professional education/quality assurance coordinator for the Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.

According to the Alabama Statewide Cancer Registry, in 1998, 240 new cervical cancer cases were reported and 85 deaths occurred. The number of cases in Alabama is 30 percent higher than the national average. The number of deaths reported ranks Alabama 13th in the nation for cervical cancer mortality.

"According to a study conducted by the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries, and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, if there is a 5 percent increase in the number of women diagnosed at early stage cervical cancer, there would be an 11 percent reduction in the number of deaths," said Reda Wilson, director of the Alabama Statewide Cancer Registry. "An increase of one woman per county in Alabama being diagnosed at an early stage would possibly save 10 lives per year."

The Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program is a program of the Alabama Department of Public Health that provides free breast and cervical exams to women ages 40 and older who are uninsured or underinsured and whose incomes are 200 percent of poverty or less. Women who qualify for the program receive a Pap smear, pelvic exam and clinical breast exam. If they are age 50 or older they also qualify for a mammogram. If there is a cancer diagnosis, treatment services are available through the Alabama Medicaid Program.

For more information about enrollment in this program, call toll free 1-877-252-3324.

