

**National Breast Cancer Awareness Month encourages women to be screened for breast cancer**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (ABCCEDP) wants to encourage all women to practice good breast health. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women in the United States and is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in women. In 2003, Alabama is estimated to have 3,400 new cases of breast cancer and 600 women will die with the disease.

The use of cancer screening and early detection procedures is an effective approach to cancer control. The American Cancer Society recommends the following:

- β Yearly mammograms starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.
- β Clinical breast exams (CBE) should be part of a periodic health exam, about every three years for women in their 20s and 30s and every year for women 40 and over.
- β Women should report any breast change promptly to their health care providers. Breast self-exam (BSE) is an option for women starting in their 20s.
- β Women at increased risk (e.g.; family history, genetic tendency, past breast cancer) should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of starting mammography screening earlier, having additional tests (e.g.; breast ultrasound or MRI), or having more frequent exams.
- β If a lump is found during these exams, then your doctor may perform further tests. Most lumps are not cancerous, but they should be examined so that a proper diagnosis can be made.

"It's in a woman's nature to take care of others first, but we all need to remember to take care of our health first, so we can help take care of others. Our program offers screening services for women who otherwise might go unscreened due to financial hardship." said Brooke Thorington, public education coordinator for the ABCCEDP of the Alabama Department of Public Health. "We want to remind all women to take time to schedule an appointment and get screened."

It is not known exactly what causes breast cancer, but certain risk factors may increase a person's chance of developing the disease. For instance, the main risk factor is being female. Another risk factor is age. Older women have a greater risk of breast cancer. Other risk factors include having a family history of breast cancer and race. Caucasian women have higher breast cancer rates than African American women. However, African American women die from this disease at a higher rate than Caucasian women and women of other ethnic groups. The

Alabama Department of Public Health strongly encourages African American women to get screened regularly to increase their chances of early detection.

Signs and symptoms of breast cancer include skin irritation or dimpling of the breast, nipple discharge other than breast milk, a painless and hard lump, swelling of part of the breast, nipple pain or nipple turning inward, and redness or scaling of the nipple or breast skin. However, few women will experience all of these symptoms.

Free pelvic exams, Pap smears and clinical breast exams are offered by selected health care providers and at county health departments to women age 40 to 64 who do not have any insurance or who are underinsured and who meet the eligibility guidelines of income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Women ages 50 to 64 without insurance or who are underinsured and meet the income eligibility guidelines will receive free screening mammograms in addition to the services mentioned.

Diagnostic services are covered, if indicated, and treatment is available for those diagnosed through the ABCCEDP who meet residential and citizenship criteria and have no other type of insurance coverage. Treatment is provided through the Alabama Medicaid Agency.

For more information, please call the toll-free at 1-877-252-3324.

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