

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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JANUARY IS CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

HPV Vaccine Prevents Cancer

Unlike many other cancers, cervical cancer is preventable. Take some time this January to observe Cervical Health Awareness Month and learn what you can do to detect and prevent cervical cancer. "It's important for women to know their risk for cervical cancer and talk with their health care provider about how it can be prevented," said Phyllis Ellis, Director of the Oneida County Health Department.

Cervical cancer is almost always caused by persistent HPV (Human Papillomavirus) infection. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. The HPV vaccine can prevent cervical cancer. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that girls begin getting the HPV vaccine at age 11 to 12. Pediatricians recommend HPV vaccine for preteens because that is the age at which the vaccine produces the best immune response in the body and because it is important to get HPV vaccine before any sexual contact takes place. Girls and young women are eligible for the vaccine from 11 - 26 years of age. If you are a parent, talk to your child's health care provider about the HPV vaccine.

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of cancer death for American women. But the cervical cancer death rate has gone down by more than 50% in the last 30 years, mostly as a result of cervical screening programs. There usually aren't any symptoms of cervical cancer in the earliest stages, so the only way a woman will find this cancer early is through regular screening.

Starting at age 21, women should be screened regularly for cervical cancer, having a Pap test every three years through age 65. At age 30, women may choose to lengthen this screening interval by having a Pap test in combination with an HPV (human papillomavirus) test every five years. Women at high risk for cervical cancer may need more frequent screening.

In addition to HPV infection, there are other factors that increase a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer, including:

- Not having regular Pap tests
- Not following up with your health care provider if you had a Pap test result that is not normal
- Having HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, or another condition that makes it hard for your body to fight off health problems
- Smoking

"All women are at risk for cervical cancer," said Phyllis Ellis, "but it is especially important for women who have not had a Pap test within the past five years to get screened. Six out of ten cervical cancers occur in women who have never received a Pap test or have not had one in the past five years."

For uninsured women age 50 and older, the New York State Cancer Services Program provides access to free cervical cancer screening. Contact the Oneida County Health Department at (315) 266-6121.

For more information about the HPV Vaccine, visit the NYS Department of Health web page: http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/human_papillomavirus/#prt1

For more information about cervical cancer, visit: <http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/cancer/cervical/>

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"PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE HEALTH OF ONEIDA COUNTY"

