



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

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Early Cervical Cancer Detection Saves Lives

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

State officials are marking Cervical Cancer Awareness Month today by encouraging women to receive a “Pap” screening test because early screening can help improve cervical cancer survival. A “Pap” exam can detect cervical abnormalities at an early, treatable stage before they develop into cancer. Also, women between the ages of 11 and 26 may want to discuss the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine with their health care provider since the vaccine helps prevent the disease which causes most cervical cancer.

“We encourage all women to talk with their health care providers about Pap testing since early detection may save their life,” said Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake. “Encourage your grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts, and women friends to get a regular Pap test. Cervical cancer is treatable and curable if found at an early stage.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cervical cancer was once a leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States. During the past 40 years, however, the Pap test has helped reduce both the number of women developing cervical cancer and the number dying from it. Unfortunately, a Department of Health Services report, *Wisconsin Cancer Incidence and Mortality, 2000-2004*, shows that only 52 percent of all cervical cancers in Wisconsin were diagnosed at an early stage, which suggests that many women are not getting regular screening for this largely preventable and treatable disease.

The Department’s Wisconsin Well Woman Program (WWWP) offers cervical cancer screening tests to eligible, uninsured, low-income women aged 45-64. This statewide network provides outreach to educate women about advances in cervical cancer prevention and the importance of regular cancer screening tests. Coordinating agencies located in each county link women to covered WWWP services within its network of healthcare providers. If a woman tested at a WWWP site is found to have cervical cancer, she may be eligible for the Well Woman Medicaid treatment component to pay for cancer treatment.

Secretary Timberlake noted that in 2007, the Wisconsin Well Woman Program provided some 6,100 Pap tests to eligible women. This year, the program’s statewide network is reaching out to find women who have never or rarely been screened for cervical cancer, and to spread the message that regular Pap test screening is key to early detection and increased survival. “Many women lack health insurance to cover a regular Pap test. The Well Woman Program provides a vital safety net to help fill the gap for uninsured women,” Timberlake said.

In addition, the Food and Drug Administration approved a vaccine in 2006 that prevents the four types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause most cervical cancers and genital warts. HPV is a sexually transmitted virus, so ideally females should receive the vaccine before becoming sexually active. The vaccine is recommended for 11 and 12 year-old girls. It is also recommended for girls and women age 13 through 26 who have not yet been vaccinated or completed the vaccine series.

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While studies suggest the vaccine provides long-lasting protection, the exact length of the vaccine protection against HPV is unknown. Therefore, it is important that even vaccinated individuals continue to see health care providers for continued Pap screening.

For more information, go to:

- Wisconsin Well Woman Program local coordinating agencies are available in all 72 counties and 11 tribes. For more information about WWP or an agency in your area, go to <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/womenshealth/WWWP/index.htm>
- National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program at <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/>
- To view the *Wisconsin Cancer Incidence and Mortality, 2000-2004* report, go to <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/wcrs/pdf/cancerwi0004.pdf>

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