



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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TENNESSEE LAUNCHES CERVICAL CANCER ELIMINATION CAMPAIGN

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition has launched a statewide campaign to eliminate cervical cancer in Tennessee. The Coalition urges all women to get a regular Pap test, the only screening test for cervical cancer, and encourages all young women to get the vaccine against the Human Papillomavirus that causes most cervical cancer. The effort begins this month as part of Tennessee's participation in the nationwide observance of Cervical Cancer Awareness Month.

"We want all Tennessee women to know how important it is to get regular Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer, since early detection is crucial for saving lives of women who develop this disease," said Health Commissioner Susan R. Cooper, MSN, RN. "We also urge young women to take the vital preventive step of getting the HPV vaccine."

Cervical cancer is a silent killer that strikes without symptoms or pain until the disease is in the advanced stage. Regular Pap tests can help save lives by detecting the disease in earlier stages when it can most effectively be treated.

HPV can infect a woman at any time during her sexually active years. Women should begin getting annual Pap tests at age 21, or earlier if they are sexually active before that age. Most women will be advised to schedule a repeat Pap test every three years after they have three normal annual Pap tests.

"Getting the HPV vaccine, regular pap tests and following your health care provider's recommendations are the best ways to help eliminate cervical cancer in Tennessee," said Debbie Wujcik, RN, PhD, chairperson for the Coalition. "While most HPV infections resolve without medical treatment, any woman in whom the virus doesn't go away on its own or with a history of abnormal Pap tests should continue in follow-up care."

Another important tool available to younger women is the vaccine against HPV, the first vaccine designed specifically to prevent cancer. This CDC-recommended vaccine became available in 2006, and is recommended for all girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 26 to prevent infection with the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancer. The Department of Health follows all vaccine recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a select group of immunization

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experts that provides guidance on control of vaccine-preventable diseases to the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC.

“Like vaccines against polio, measles and other vaccines that have eliminated diseases that routinely killed and disabled people in the United States during the previous century, the HPV vaccine is a breakthrough in health because it can actually prevent cancer when given to girls and young women,” said Kelly Moore, MD, MPH, medical director of the Tennessee Immunization Program. “If young women and girls get this vaccine and all women get screened regularly, then cervical cancer can also become a disease of the past.”

Sharon, a cervical cancer patient diagnosed at age 35 and who lost her battle against the disease, offered this advice for parents of young girls:

“I am 37 years old now. With a life expectancy of less than six months, I am on a mission to help others. I am asking that parents who have daughters get them the Human Papillomavirus vaccine. This vaccine can prevent HPV, a disease that can lead to cervical cancer. I have taken my two daughters for vaccinations because I don’t want them to go through what I have experienced.”

The Tennessee Department of Health provides Pap tests through the Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program to women who do not have access to routine health care. For more information, call the Tennessee Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program at 1-877-96-WOMEN (1-877-969-6636), or visit the TDOH Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/BCC/index.htm>.

The HPV vaccine is available at Tennessee’s county health departments. The federal Vaccines for Children program makes the HPV vaccine available free of charge to girls under 19 years of age who are uninsured, on TennCare or who have insurance that doesn’t cover the vaccine. Other young women may purchase the vaccine at cost plus a small administration fee. Some 500 private doctors’ offices in Tennessee also participate in the VFC program. Contact your health provider or your local county health department for more information. A list of county health departments can be found online at <http://health.state.tn.us/localdepartments.htm>.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition urges Tennessee women to take part in the effort to eliminate cervical cancer in our state. Getting the HPV vaccine and regular Pap tests will help realize this goal in our lifetime. Contact your health care provider to learn more about these important measures for preventing cancer.

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This press release can be accessed online at <http://news.tennesseeanytime.org/taxonomy/term/30> .