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**WOMEN'S HEALTH SCREENINGS SAVE LIVES
January is Cervical Health Awareness Month**

The Westchester County Department of Health is reminding women in Westchester that routine Pap tests and pelvic exams save lives.

“Each year in the United States, about 14,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and more than 3,900 women die from this disease,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “The great tragedy is that many of those deaths could be prevented with routine screening and early treatment. If abnormalities are discovered early enough, cervical cancer can often be prevented from developing altogether,” he said.

Routine Pap Tests and Pelvic Exams

Women are advised to receive a Pap test and pelvic exam at least once every three years, beginning about three years after they become sexually active, but no later than age 21. If the Pap test shows abnormalities, further tests and possibly treatment may be necessary. Approximately six percent of Pap tests yield abnormal results requiring medical follow up. Early discovery of cervical cancer greatly increases the chances for survival.

To help women in the Westchester County receive the recommended screenings, the Westchester County Health Department is the lead agency of the Healthy Living Partnership, which provides free cervical cancer screenings to uninsured or underinsured women. Over 3,500 such women are served each year through the program and at least 100 women each year receive diagnostic evaluations for abnormalities detected by the screenings. At least 20 women per year are linked to life-saving treatment through the Healthy Living Partnership.

MORE

HPV Vaccine

A vaccine has been developed which protects against four strains of human papillomaviruses (HPV), two of which account for 70 percent of cases of cervical cancer. This vaccine is currently approved for women aged 19 to 26 years. The Health Department recommends that women continue to receive routine cervical health screenings every three years even if they have received the vaccination.

HPV infection is very common and it is believed that up to 80 percent of women aged 50 have been infected with HPV at some time in their lives. Fortunately, only a small percentage of women with untreated HPV infection develop cervical cancer. Nevertheless, infection with HPV virus is now considered to be the primary risk factor leading to cervical cancer.

HPV infection is more common in young adults, particularly among women in their late teens and twenties. Since HPV is spread mainly through sexual contact, the risk of infection increases with the number of sexual partners a person has. Women who become sexually active at a young age; those who have multiple sexual partners; and those whose sexual partners have other partners are at increased risk.

“The Pap test is the most effective cancer screening technique in medical history,” said Dr. Lipsman. “The HPV vaccine will likely be most effective if given to young girls before the onset of sexual activity. But protection offered by the vaccine is limited and women should therefore continue to receive cervical cancer screenings even if they have been vaccinated against HPV.”

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000, or visit the Health Department web site at www.westchestgov.com/health.