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From: Cancer Services Program of Niagara County

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January is Cervical Health Awareness Month

Take some time this January to observe Cervical Health Awareness Month and learn what you can do to detect and prevent cervical cancer. "Cervical Health Awareness Month is an excellent time for women to talk to their health care provider about cervical cancer screening and prevention", said Claudia Kurtzworth, Coordinator of the Cancer Services Program of Niagara County. "Regular health visits and follow-up care can help women avoid cervical cancer."

There usually aren't any symptoms of cervical cancer in its earliest, most treatable stage. So it is important for women to get a Pap test (or Pap smear) regularly. The Pap test can prevent cervical cancer or find it early. In the United States, the Pap test has reduced cervical cancer rates by more than 70%.

Cervical cancer is almost always caused by persistent infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV) which is a common virus that can be spread from one person to another during sex. Women who are sexually active can reduce their risk for HPV infection by using latex condoms during sex and by reducing the number of sexual partners. Females between the ages of 9 and 26 or their parents can also talk to their doctor about the HPV vaccine which protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancer. "It is still important for women to have regular Pap testing even if they've received the HPV vaccine", said Kurtzworth.

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 and should visit their health care provider for regular Pap testing", said Kurtzworth. "It is especially important for women who have not had a Pap test within the past five years to get screened because 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." It also is important to continue getting a Pap test even if you think you are too old to have a child, or are not having sex anymore.

There are many ways women can live a healthy lifestyle and help improve outcomes related to cancer. These include not smoking and avoiding second-hand smoke, making healthy food choices, getting regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and getting recommended cancer screenings.

New York State and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fund Cancer Services Program Partnerships in each county to provide access to cervical cancer screening to uninsured women, ages 40 and older. To find a Cancer Services Program Partnership in your community, visit <http://www.nyhealth.gov/nysdoh/cancer/center/partnerships/> or call 1-866-442-CANCER (2262).

For more information about the HPV vaccine, visit:

http://www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/immunization/human_papillomavirus/index.htm

For more information about cervical cancer, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/index.htm>

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