

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month

Did you know that 13,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year? January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, a reminder that cervical cancer is preventable, and vaccination for HPV and appropriate screening (HPV and Pap tests) are important for women's reproductive health.

HPV Vaccination

HPV, short for human papillomavirus, is spread by intimate sexual contact and is so common, nearly all men and women will become infected with at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives. Most people aren't aware that they've been infected and may give HPV to a sex partner without knowing it. While most people with HPV never develop symptoms or health problems, HPV infections can cause cervical cancer and other cancers in both women and men. Fortunately, vaccinations can prevent infection from the types of HPV that most commonly cause cancer, with close to 100% protection against cervical pre-cancers and genital warts.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that all girls and boys 11 or 12 years old receive the recommended series of HPV vaccine. It can be started as early as age 9, and is most effective prior to sexual activity and HPV exposure. Teen boys and girls who did not get vaccinated when they were younger should get it now. The HPV vaccine is recommended for young women through age 26 and young men through age 21, as well as for the following people if they did not get vaccinated when they were younger:

- young men who have sex with men, including young men who identify as gay or bisexual or who intend to have sex with men through age 26;
- young adults who are transgender through age 26; and
- young adults with certain immunocompromising conditions (including HIV) through age 26.

Screening for Cervical Cancer

Early detection is important because cervical cancer usually does not have symptoms until it is quite advanced, very serious, and difficult to treat. Two screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer or detect it early:

- The Pap test (or Pap smear) can find abnormal cells on the cervix so that they can be removed before cancer develops.
- The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes.



Both tests should be started at age 21 and can be done in a doctor's office or clinic.

primary care, or mental health care for children or adults, contact InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.

