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January Is Cervical Health Awareness Month

Springfield – This January, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is observing Cervical Health Awareness Month to highlight issues related to cervical cancer, HPV disease, and the importance of early detection.

Cervical cancer forms in the tissues of the cervix (the lower, narrow end of the uterus or womb that connects the vagina or birth canal to the upper part of the uterus). Cervical cancer is almost always caused by infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). To highlight this link, IDPH received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct a media campaign promoting the HPV vaccine across the state. This campaign will build upon the successful 2014 Chicago Department of Public Health 2014 campaign that helped to increase the percentage of Chicago teens (males and females) who received the HPV vaccine dramatically.

“We know that with routine screening, cervical cancer is highly preventable, and yet more than 4000 women were estimated to have lost their lives to cervical cancer in 2015,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “In addition to routine screening, I encourage women, along with adolescent girls, boys, and their parents to ask their health care provider about HPV vaccines, which are highly effective at preventing certain forms of HPV.”

Each year approximately 12,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with cervical cancer; of those, roughly 500 are Illinoisans. CDC reports that half of the cervical cancers occurred among women who are *rarely* or *never* screened for cervical cancer. There are often no noticeable symptoms of cervical cancer in its early stage, which is why it is important for women to be screened regularly. Symptoms usually develop when the cancer has become invasive and attacks nearby tissue. The most common symptom is abnormal vaginal bleeding. Although cervical cancer usually grows slowly, it can be detected with regular Pap tests (a procedure in which cells are scraped from the cervix and looked at under a microscope).

The Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP) provides free cervical cancer screenings, pelvic exams, diagnostic services, and referrals to uninsured and under insured Illinois women 35 years and older, regardless of income. In 2015, IBCCP identified 290 cervical abnormalities with 16 cervical cancers, and, over the past five years, identified 170 cases of cervical cancer. Call the health line at 1-888-522-1282 for more information.

To learn more about cervical cancer, visit: National Cancer Institute, American Cancer Society, Center for Diseases Control and Prevention and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

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Please add the following to this press release:

The Iroquois County Public Health Department is now enrolling women in the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. If you are an uninsured or underinsured woman between the ages of 35 and 64, please call Jane Newell at 815-432-2483 to enroll and receive free cervical cancer screenings. Iroquois County Public Health Department also has HPV vaccines available. Being vaccinated against HPV makes it much less likely a woman will develop cervical cancer. Please call 815-432-2483 for more information or to schedule an appointment.