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January Is Cervical Health Awareness Month

Cervical Health Awareness Month is a chance to raise awareness about how women can protect themselves from HPV (human papillomavirus) and cervical cancer. HPV is a very common infection that spreads through sexual activity and it causes almost all cases of cervical cancer. About 79 million Americans currently have HPV but many people with HPV don't know they are infected. More than 11,000 women in the United States get cervical cancer every year.

There are two tests that can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early. The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancerous cells, which are cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately. The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes. Women should begin having regular cervical cancer screenings at age 21.

In addition to these screenings, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommends that preteens should get the HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12. This vaccine can prevent HPV and therefore provides protection against cervical cancer. Women up to age 26 and men up to age 21 can get the vaccine.

The Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP) provides free cervical cancer screenings, pelvic exams, diagnostic services, and referrals to uninsured and underinsured Illinois women 21 years and older, regardless of income. 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 21 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 for adolescents and young adults. Being vaccinated against HPV makes it much less likely a woman will develop cervical cancer. Please call the Iroquois County Public Health Department at 815-432-2483 for more information or to schedule an appointment.