

## **Cervical Cancer Awareness Month**

You look healthy, you feel fine, but you may not be as healthy as you think. You may have cervical cancer and not even know it. Because the month of January has been nationally recognized as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, the Southeastern District Health Department (SDHD) would like to remind women to get tested for cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the easiest female cancer to prevent, with regular screening tests and follow-up.

The screening tests that are recommended by the CDC are as follows:

- The Pap test (or Pap Smear) looks for precancers, cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated. Women should start getting regular Pap tests at age 21, or within three years of the first time you have sex, whichever happens first. The Pap test is one of the most reliable and effective cancer screening tests available.
- The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes. The HPV test may be used for screening women aged 30 years and older, or at any age for those who have unclear Pap test results.

The Pap test is recommended for all women. Talk with your doctor, nurse, or other health care professional about whether the HPV test is right for you. If you do not have insurance or have a low income, you may be able to get a free or low cost Pap test through SDHD's Women's Health Check Program. For additional information about the program, contact 239-5232.

To prevent cervical cancer, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends women do the following:

- Get the HPV vaccine. It protects against the HPV types that most often cause cervical cancer and is given in a series of three shots. The vaccine is recommended for girls 11 and 12 years of age. The vaccine can also be given to females aged 13 through 26 who did not get any or all of the shots yet.
- See your doctor regularly for a Pap test that can find cervical precancer.
- Follow up with your doctor if your test results are not normal.
- Don't smoke.
- Use condoms during sex.
- Limit your number of sexual partners.

Cancer is not a topic that people like to discuss, but we must talk about it and raise awareness on the importance of getting screened.

Talk with your doctor about getting screened it can save your life!

For more information contact Tracy McCulloch, Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Coordinator, at the Southeastern District Health Department at 239-5250 or at [www.sdhdidaho.org](http://www.sdhdidaho.org) or visit [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer).