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JANUARY IS CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH
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January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, and the Monongalia County Health Department wants you to know that there’s a lot you can do to prevent cervical cancer.

All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It occurs most often in women over the age of 30. According to CDC, each year about 12,000 women in the U.S. get cervical cancer and about 4,000 women die from it.

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a major cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a very common infection that spreads through sexual activity. About 79 million Americans currently have HPV, but many people with HPV don’t know they are infected.

HPV vaccine can prevent HPV infection. Parents can protect their children by making sure pre-teens get the HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12. Teens and young adults up to the age of 26 also need to get the HPV vaccine if they didn’t get the vaccine as pre-teens.

Cervical cancer can often be prevented with regular screening tests (called Pap tests) and follow-up care. It is recommended that women start getting regular Pap tests at age 21. Your physician may also request an HPV test. The HPV test looks for the virus that causes cells to turn into cervical cancer.

CDC lists three other ways to help lower your risk for cervical cancer: 1. Don’t smoke, 2. Use condoms during sex and 3. limit your number of sexual partners.

Jennifer Goldcamp, Director of MCHD Nursing, said “The HPV vaccine can significantly lower the risk of HPV infection and cervical cancer. The best time for vaccination is during the pre-teen years and parents should contact their healthcare provider for more information if their children have not yet been vaccinated. However, the HPV vaccine can be given up to the age of 26.” She went on to say that women should start Pap smear testing at age 21. The PAP smear looks for precancers cells on the cervix that may become cervical cancer. Most deaths from cervical cancer can be prevented by early detection and early treatment of precancerous cells.

For more information on cervical cancer or to make an appointment for an HPV vaccination, call the MCHD at 304-598-5119.

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