

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

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Health Department Promotes Cervical Cancer Prevention

Hastings, Nebraska. Local health officials are promoting vaccination to prevent cancer. According to South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) executive director Michele Bever, the SHDHD wants residents of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties to know the facts about cervical cancer and how to prevent it. “January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, a time for us to raise awareness about cervical cancer and the HPV vaccine that can help prevent it, as well as other cancers, from ever developing,” she said.

Every year in the United States, the human papilloma virus, called HPV for short, infects about 13 million people, including teens, and causes about 11,000 cases of cervical cancer. HPV also causes cancers of the vagina (700 cases) and vulva (2,800 cases) in women; cancers of the penis in men (900 cases); and cancers of the anus (6,500 cases) and oropharynx (back of the throat, 14,000 cases) in men and women every year. Fortunately, there is an effective HPV vaccine available that can prevent most of these cancers.

Janis Johnson, RN, BSN, immunization clinic manager with SHDHD, said the health department wants to share information to help people make decisions about vaccinating family members to prevent these cancers caused by the HPV virus, including cervical cancer.

Johnson said that some HPV virus types can cause warts and some types can lead to cancer. She said that both men and women can be infected by HPV viruses and be at risk for developing cancer as a result.

“HPV is a virus that is transmitted through various types of intimate skin-to-skin contact and is so common that nearly all men and women get infected at some point in their lives,” said Johnson.

According to the CDC, many HPV infections will cause little or no problems because of the remarkable work of our immune systems, but some HPV infections can lead to cancers which may require surgery such as a hysterectomy or removal of genital tissue that may leave lasting effects on a person’s physical, emotional or sexual health. Some infections, although rare, may even lead to death.

South Heartland health officials say that vaccination is the number one recommendation for prevention of the cancers caused by HPV. According to Johnson, the HPV vaccine should be given within the recommended ages of 9-12 for both boys and girls, long before ever being exposed to the virus and sexual activity. “HPV vaccination at ages 11-12 could prevent over 90% of these cancers,” she said.

Johnson said studies have shown there is no increase in early sexual behavior in boys or girls who have received HPV vaccination. “HPV vaccination is cancer prevention,” she said. “Getting HPV vaccine for your child now is better than treating an HPV cancer later in life.”

The Vaccines for Children program at South Heartland helps eligible individuals afford recommended vaccines, including the HPV vaccination. For more information contact SHDHD at 1-877-238-7595.