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For Immediate Release

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## Screen and Vaccinate To Prevent Cervical Cancer

Approximately 12,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year. According to Dorrann Hultman, public health nurse for South Heartland District Health Department, all women are at risk for cervical cancer, but when cervical cancers are found early and treated, women can live long and healthy lives.

“Unfortunately, a cervical cancer not detected at an early stage can cost a woman her life,” said Hultman.

Cervical cancer is a very preventable cancer because screening tests and vaccines to prevent human papillomavirus (HPV) are available.

“Screening tests can find abnormal cells so they can be treated before they turn into cancer,” said Hultman. “Cervical cancer screening tests for women are recommended starting at age 21.”

The United States Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) has the following recommendations for cervical cancer screening (pap smears):

- Age 21-65, screening pap smears are recommended every 3 years
- Age 30-65, screening pap smears are recommended every 3 years or co-testing, which is a pap smear and HPV testing together, every 5 years
- Younger than 21, screening pap smears are not recommended

Human Papillomavirus (HPV, for short) is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV also can cause cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus and the mouth and throat. HPV can cause genital warts, which are not life threatening but can lead to emotional stress and discomfort.

HPV is a virus that is passed from one person to another during skin to skin intimate contact. Most sexually active people will be infected by HPV at some time in their lives and many will never know they have it.

“Most of the time a person’s immune system will fight off HPV before health problems arise,” says Hultman. “But because of the HPV link to many cancers, it is important to know about the virus and what steps you can take to protect yourself and your family from these preventable and deadly cancers.”

HPV vaccination is cancer prevention. The CDC and partner organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend HPV vaccination of both girls and boys at ages 11 or 12. The HPV vaccine is available to young women and men until they are 27 years old.

According to Ms. Hultman, this vaccine is a 2-dose series when given before age 15 and a 3-dose series after age 15. The Vaccine for Children (VFC) program provides vaccine for children ages 18 years and younger who are uninsured, Medicaid-eligible or American Indian/Alaska Native. The VFC program is available at SHDHD and other area health care providers.

Hultman urges all residents of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties to take action and follow these screening and vaccination recommendations.

SHDHD staff, members of the South Heartland Cancer Coalition, and area community health workers are committed to reducing the number of deaths from cancer across the district. They can assist people in finding local resources for screening, vaccination and supporting programs for living a healthy lifestyle that reduces risks for cancer.

Contact SHDHD at 402-462-6211 or 1-877-238-7595 for more information or to schedule an appointment at the monthly VFC clinic. Additional information on HPV and cancer can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html>.

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