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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) 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, causes 10,800 cases of cervical cancer. HPV also causes cancers of the vagina and vulva in women; cancers of the penis in men; and cancers of the anus and oropharynx (back of the throat) in men and women. Fortunately, HPV vaccination could prevent most of these cancers.

Dorrann Hultman, community health services coordinator with SHDHD, said that the health department wants to share information to help people make decisions about vaccinating family members to prevent these types of cancer, including cervical cancer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), human papilloma virus (HPV) is a name given to a group of more than 150 related viruses. These viruses can affect people in different ways, depending on which virus type a person is exposed to and how one’s body responds to the virus.

Hultman 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 the HPV virus and be at risk for developing cancer as a result.

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.

“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 it at some point in their lives,” said Hultman.

South Heartland health officials say that vaccination is the number one recommendation for prevention of the cancers caused by HPV. According to Hultman, the HPV vaccine should be given at the recommended age of 11-12 for both boys and girls prior to sexual activity, however it can be given as early as age 9 and through age 26 for women and 21 for men unless there are additional risk factors and then through age 26. Maximum protection occurs when the full series is completed which includes 2 doses if given prior to age 15 and 3 doses if age 15 years or older.

Hultman said that 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.