



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

The Jackson County Department of Public Health recognizes January as Cervical Cancer Awareness month. All women are at risk for cervical cancer, though it occurs most often in women over age 30. Almost all cervical cancers are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus that can be passed from one person to another during sex. Screening tests and the HPV vaccine can help prevent cervical cancer. When it is found early, cervical cancer is highly treatable and associated with long survival and good quality of life. The NC State Center for Health Statistics projected that in 2022, more than 409 women in North Carolina will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and over 126 will die from this disease.

Pap tests and HPV tests are the two screening tests that can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early. The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancers which are cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately. The HPV test looks for human papillomavirus that can cause these cell changes. If you are uninsured or underinsured, you may qualify for free cervical cancer screenings through the North Carolina Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (NC BCCCP). NC BCCCP provides free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings and follow-up to eligible women. NC BCCCP services are provided at the Jackson County Department of Public Health. Call BCCCP Program Coordinator, Chanta Ashe, at 828-587-8213 to see if you qualify and schedule your cervical cancer screenings.

The main risk factor for developing cervical cancer is having an HPV type that causes cervical cancer, but other things can increase your risk. The most important thing you can do to help prevent cervical cancer is to get vaccinated early and have regular screening tests. The HPV vaccination is recommended for preteens ages 11-12 years but can be given starting at age 9 and is recommended for everyone through age 26 years if they are not vaccinated already. While HPV vaccination prevents new HPV infections, it does not treat existing infections or diseases. This is why the HPV vaccine works best when given before any exposure to HPV. You should still get screened for cervical cancer regularly, even if you received the HPV vaccine.

Talk with your doctor about your risk factors and they can help you decide how often to screen for cervical cancer, and which tests you need. For more information about NC BCCCP visit <https://bcccp.dph.ncdhhs.gov/>. For more information about NC BCCCP services at the Jackson County Department of Public Health, or to schedule a cervical cancer screening, call 828-587-8213.

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