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January is Cervical Health Awareness Month: A Call to Action

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about the importance of cervical health and encourage proactive steps in preventing cervical cancer. The New York State Department of Health reports that around 843 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed every year in New York State. Additionally, nearly 255 females lose their lives to this disease annually. With proper care, early detection, and education, cervical cancer is one of the most preventable forms of cancer.

Cervical Cancer and Prevention

Cervical cancer develops slowly over time, often starting with abnormal cells on the cervix. In most cases, it is caused by persistent infection with high-risk strains of HPV. Regular screenings, such as Pap smears and HPV (Human Papillomavirus) tests are important for the early detection of cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine also offers further protections against common cancer-causing strains of HPV. It is most effective when given before exposure to the virus.

"Scheduling routine screenings and receiving the HPV vaccine can significantly decrease the risk of cervical cancer, states Brenden Bedard, Director of Community Health Services for the Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments (GO Health).

Take Action

During Cervical Health Awareness Month, GO Health is encouraging individuals to:

1. **Get screened regularly:** Women aged 21 to 65 should have a Pap smear every 3 years, or both Pap and HPV tests every 5 years if recommended by their doctor according to the National Cancer Institute.



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2. **Get vaccinated:** The HPV vaccine is recommended for boys and girls, between the ages of 11-26, but can also be started as early as age 9.
3. **Talk to your doctor:** Talk to your healthcare provider about cervical health, screenings, and the HPV vaccine, especially if you have concerns or a family history of cervical cancer.

"We encourage all women to prioritize their health by scheduling their screenings and learning more about HPV prevention. Through education and access to screenings, we can continue to fight cervical cancer and empower individuals to take control of their health," stated Paul Pettit, Public Health Director for GO Health.

For more information about cervical health, screenings, and the HPV vaccine, visit <https://www.cancer.gov/types/cervical>

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