Fact Sheet for Cervical Cancer Awareness / Screening Week 2017

Cervical cancer, a disease that originates from the cells of the cervix, is a leading cause of cancer death for women around the world -- including First Nations and non-First Nations women in Canada.

One major way to avoid cervical cancer is to get regular Pap tests. Early detection through cervical cancer screening (Pap tests), and prevention through HPV vaccination, can save lives. To protect your health, or the health of your loved ones, it is important to know that:

• Cervical cancer can be caused by HPV (Human Papilloma Virus).
• Cervical cancer can be prevented by getting the HPV vaccination.
• Cervical cancer can be avoided if abnormal cells in the cervix are detected early through regular Pap tests.

Please read on for information about HPV, the HPV vaccination, and cervical cancer screening (Pap tests).

ABOUT HPV

• HPV, or Human Papilloma Virus, is the most common sexually transmitted infection in North America.
• HPV affects everyone, not just women, and can cause cervical, vulva, vaginal, rectal, penile, head and neck cancers as well as hundreds of other diseases like genital warts.

ABOUT THE HPV VACCINE

• The HPV vaccine offers 96% to 97% protection for cervical, vulvar and vaginal disease.
• The HPV vaccine was approved by Health Canada in 2006 to fight against HPV, which can cause cervical, vulva, vaginal, rectal, penile, and head & neck cancers.
• The HPV vaccine Gardasil 9 is publicly funded in schools. It is called Gardasil 9 because it guards against the nine types of HPV that cause approximately 70%-80% of cervical and anal cancer cases.
• Gardasil 9 covers cervical cancer, genital warts, and anal, vulvar and vaginal cancers. The HPV vaccine is offered in schools to both girls and boys to attempt to ensure vaccination occurs BEFORE exposure, but it is also available through community health nurses to women and girls (ages 9-45) and boys/men (ages 9-26).
• Over 217 million doses of the vaccine have been given worldwide with no global safety concerns, and Health Canada continues to monitor the safety of the vaccine long term.
• Minor side effects from the vaccine include: pain, redness and swelling at the injection site; headache; and fever. These are normal responses by the body's immune system.
• Serious side effects are very rare, and have not been clearly shown to be linked to the HPV vaccine.
• HPV vaccinations do not replace Pap tests. Both are important: HPV vaccines can protect against HPV, while Pap tests can detect early HPV-related cancer to treat and help avoid worsening disease.
• The vaccine is still important to get even if you have had an abnormal Pap test result or already have genital warts!

ABOUT PAP TESTS

• Pap tests, also known as cervical cancer screening, are tests to detect abnormal cervical cells and early changes on the cervix before they progress to become cervical cancer.
• People between 25 and 69 who have a cervix should get Pap tests every three years.
• Pap tests are still necessary even after getting the HPV vaccination.
• Pap tests are a vital screening tool for early detection of disease; they are the most reliable method of screening for cervical cancer.
• Pap tests are important even if there are no symptoms -- cervical cancer may not have symptoms, e.g., abnormal bleeding, pelvic pain, abnormal vaginal discharge.
• Getting screened for cervical cancer can be awkward. It’s important that you feel comfortable with your healthcare provider, and that you’re able to speak about your feelings with him or her.

• Here are few ways that may make getting screened for cervical cancer more comfortable:
  o Speak to your healthcare provider about the test, the instruments that will be used, and how you are feeling before committing to the procedure.
  o Ask your friends and family about their experiences screening for cervical cancer, and methods that they have used to make the procedure more comfortable.
  o Bring a friend or a support person with you to your appointment, and invite them into the room to support you during the procedure.

• Being called back to discuss your results or having abnormal results doesn’t mean you have cancer. You may have to have more frequent screenings or further evaluations of your cervix. In some cases, you may need treatments to avoid developing cervical cancer.