

## Cervical Health Awareness Month

Cervical Health Awareness Month is marked every year in January to encourage women to be more attentive to their health. Cervical health awareness month helps to raise awareness about cervical cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatments. It promotes education on cervical health and encourages vaccination and screening to help eliminate this preventable cancer.

There are screening tests like the HPV (Human papillomavirus) test and Pap test that can find cervical cancer early or help prevent it from happening. The HPV test looks for the virus that causes cell changes on the cervix and the Pap test (Pap smear) looks for signs of precancers, which are cell changes on the cervix that could become cervical cancer if not treated appropriately. Starting at the age of 21, women should get Pap tests done. If your test comes back as normal, your doctor may have you wait 3 years until your next test. If you are between the age of 30-65 years old you have 3 options of testing and you can speak with your doctor to see which is right for you.

Option 1: You can get an HPV test only. If your test comes back normal your doctor may have you wait 5 years until your next screening test.

Option 2: You can get a Pap test only. If your results come back normal, your doctor may have you wait 3 years before your next screening.

Option 3: You could get an HPV test and a pap test. If both results come back normal, your doctor may have you wait 5 years until your next screening.

If you are over the age of 65, your doctor may tell you that you no longer need to be screened if you have had normal test results for several years and not had a cervical precancer in the past or you have had your cervix removed as part of a hysterectomy for non- cancerous conditions like fibroids.

There is also the HPV vaccine that helps protect against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancers. HPV doesn't just cause cervical cancer in women but it can cause other types of cancer in men and women. The HPV vaccination prevents new HPV infections, but it does not treat existing infections or diseases. That's why the HPV vaccine works best when given before any exposure to HPV. The HPV vaccination is recommended for pre-teens that are aged 11-12 years but can be given starting at the age of 9 years. It is also recommended for everyone through the age of 26 years if they have not already been vaccinated. If you are over the age of 26 years it is not recommended, but some adults between the ages of 27- 45 years who are not already vaccinated want to get the HPV vaccination, they should speak with their doctor about the risk for new HPV infections and the possible benefits of the vaccination as the vaccination in this age range provides less benefit.

Cervical health is one aspect of health that many women neglect throughout their lives. By becoming more knowledgeable about this, women can detect any health issues at an early stage and get access to the best treatment.

For more information about the HPV vaccine, contact the Meigs County Health Department (MCHD) at (740)992-6626. The vaccine is available at the MCHD. No appointment is necessary Monday-Friday from 8AM-11:45PM or 1:00-3:30PM. Our office is located at 112 E Memorial Dr, Suite A, Pomeroy OH. Please bring your photo ID and health insurance card(s), if applicable.

If you need any women's health services, you can call and schedule an appointment with Ohio Health Wellness on Wheels (WOW) at (740)331-7373. WOW visits the MCHD every Tuesday from 9am-3pm. They offer primary care services from 9am- 12pm and women's health services from 1pm-2:30pm.

If you are un/under insured, the the Southeast Ohio Breast and Cervical Cancer Project (SEOBCCP) might be able to help.

What does SEOBCCP do?

- Provides Screenings: Funds mammograms for breast cancer and Pap/HPV tests for cervical cancer based on age and income guidelines.
- Covers Diagnostics: Offers funding for follow-up diagnostic services if initial screenings are abnormal.
- Serves the Underserved: Aims to reduce health disparities by helping women who might not otherwise be able to afford these essential tests.

In Simple Terms: The SEOBCCP offers vital cancer screenings (mammograms, Pap/HPV tests) and diagnostic services, often free or low-cost, for eligible women in Southeast Ohio to catch breast and cervical cancers early, helping local health departments like MCHD provide crucial preventative care and improve health outcomes. It's a program that helps women in Southeast Ohio get screened for breast and cervical cancer, preventing serious illness and saving lives by making care accessible. The phone number for the SEOBCCP is 1-800-236-6253.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/features/cervical-cancer.html>

<https://www.nccc-online.org/cervical-health-awareness-month/>

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