



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Pap Tests Best Defense Against Cervical Cancer**

The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that approximately 12,000 women are diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer a year. Last year, 12,340 new cases were diagnosed that resulted in over 4,000 deaths.

At one time, cervical cancer was one of the most common causes of cancer deaths among American women. Between 1955 and 1992, the cervical cancer mortality rate dropped by 70 percent, according to ACS. The Pap test (pelvic exam) is credited for this drastic decline.

“When I see patients and discuss when and how often to screen for cervical cancer with a Pap smear, I take into account their age and history,” said Nurse Practitioner Ashley English, MSN, FNP-BC, at Live Well Community Health Center – Waverly. She also adheres to the latest guidelines by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

For women who have abnormal Pap test results, she recommends discussing routine screenings and follow-ups with their health care provider. As for women who don't have abnormal results, English said the guidelines can vary:

- Women don't need to be tested before age 21 regardless of behaviors or risk factors.
- Women 21-29 years old should have a cervical screening (or smear) every three years with no HPV test. (A cervical screening analyzes cells taken from the cervix under a microscope. This is done to determine what the cells look like, and how they form and function.)
- Women 30-65 years old should be tested for HPV (human papillomavirus) and have a cervical screening every five years, or, have a cervical screening only, every three years.
- Women older than 65 years old, who haven't had negative screening results over three consecutive years, do not need further testing.

#### **High-risk factors**

While all women are at risk for cervical cancer, certain factors like HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and HPV increase risks. Smoking and using birth control pills for at least five years also increases risk. Additionally, women who have given birth to three or more children are at greater risk.

## **Symptoms**

There are usually no symptoms for cervical cancer unless the condition is advanced. In this instance, abnormal bleeding and vaginal discharge are most common.

## **Prevention**

The best defense is routine Pap tests. If test results are abnormal, English stresses the importance of a follow-up visit with a health care provider. Other prevention measures include not smoking and condom use.

## **Well Woman Exams**

As a provision of the Affordable Care Act, well woman visits are now provided at no out-of-pocket costs for women who are insured.

“The well woman exam, as a whole, is important for women because it is a preventative appointment that focuses on health and well-being,” English said.

“Screenings are also done for breast and gynecological cancers, but we also answer patient questions, discuss overall health and provide lifestyle counseling.”

As for the Live Well clinic, it now provides prenatal care and other OB/GYN procedures like abnormal Pap tests follow-up, IUD placement or removal, as well as other contraceptive procedures. These services are provided every other Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. by certified midwives from Fitzgibbon Hospital.

Live Well is owned and operated by the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri, and was recently designated as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

For more information, call 660.493.2262 or visit [LiveWellCenters.org](http://LiveWellCenters.org).

## **Among HCC's current programs and services are:**

- Health information technology initiatives to support telemedicine and telehealth services designed to increase patient access to quality health care;
- Diabetes and Depression Program to improve the health status of individuals with diabetes and/or depression;
- Student nursing programs through a collaboration with Area Health Education Centers (AHEC);
- ACA Health Insurance Marketplace enrollment assistance;
- Rural Health Initiative, funded by REACH, to increase access to quality health care
- Primary care, oral health care, behavioral health care, and OB/GYN services

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