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Contact:

Carol McPhail

USA Health Marketing and Communications

cmcphail@health.southalabama.edu

251-422-4909

GO Teal and White campaign has a message about cervical cancer: It's preventable

MOBILE, Alabama (01/08/2024) – Get the HPV vaccine if you are eligible. Get screening tests for cervical cancer, and follow up with treatment for pre-cancers.

Those are the chief messages of the GO Teal and White campaign, a statewide initiative during January that raises awareness about preventing cervical cancer, which was diagnosed in almost 14,000 women in the United States last year and was responsible for more than 4,000 deaths.

Alabama's cervical cancer rates are among the highest in the nation, with 8.9 cases diagnosed per 100,000 people in 2020 and 3.3 deaths per 100,000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We want everyone to know that this deadly disease, which kills thousands of women each year, can be prevented," said Jennifer Young Pierce, M.D., M.P.H., FACOG, director of the Division of Cancer Control and Prevention at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute. "It involves a collective effort – vaccinating our adolescents against HPV and making sure that our mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters are getting the screening tests recommended by their doctors and are following up on the results of those tests."

Cervical cancer is most frequently diagnosed in women between the ages of 35 and 44. Like many cancers, it is more treatable if detected at an early stage or as a pre-cancer. Screening involves a pap test and a test for the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is responsible for 99 out of 100 cervical cancer cases.

In addition, vaccinating boys and girls against HPV during adolescence is key to preventing cancer later in life, Pierce said. The HPV vaccine is recommended for all adolescents, adults up to age 26 and for those at high risk up to age 45.

The GO Teal and White campaign is hosted by the Mitchell Cancer Institute and supported by partner organizations from across Alabama. The campaign's name is a compilation of GO for Gynecologic Oncology, and teal and white, the colors that represent cervical cancer awareness.

"Our goal is to get the word out to prevent cervical cancer and save lives through vaccination, screening and follow up," Pierce said.

The GO Teal and White campaign calls on businesses, nonprofits and supporters to spread messages about cervical cancer prevention by hanging GO Teal and White posters during January and by wearing teal and white on GO Teal and White Day, Friday, Jan. 19.

A 2022 report on cervical cancer by Alabama Public Health showed that Black women had a higher cervical cancer rate than white women and were more likely to die from the disease. The report also

identified barriers to screening among women in Alabama including a lack of gynecologists in rural areas, concerns about costs, and structural barriers such as a lack of childcare or transportation.

“We recognize that too many women in Alabama lack resources or access to healthcare, which puts them at higher risk of developing advanced cervical cancer,” Pierce said. “We want these women to know there are programs available that can make these screenings, and cancer prevention, possible.”

The Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (ABCCEDP) provides free breast and cervical cancer screenings for women who meet certain criteria, such as having a lack of sufficient insurance and a household income below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The ABCCEDP, part of Alabama Public Health, is partnering with the Mitchell Cancer Institute for the GO Teal and White Campaign. Other partners include the American Cancer Society, the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, VAX 2 STOP CANCER, the Alabama Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition, Operation Wipe Out Cervical Cancer Alabama, Go Doc Go and Project Inspire.

The GO Teal and White campaign offers the following recommendations to prevent cervical cancer:

- Get screened. An HPV test, which can help detect cancer earlier, is recommended starting at age 30. A pap test is recommended every three to five years for women ages 21 to 64.
- Follow up with your healthcare provider on any abnormal screening results to receive appropriate treatment. The treatment of pre-cancer prevents the cancer, not the pap test itself.
- Vaccinate boys and girls against HPV, ideally between the ages of 9 and 12. The HPV vaccine is recommended for all adolescents and adults up to age 26 and up to age 45 based on risk factors for HPV-related illness or cancer.
- For more information, visit the GO Teal and White webpage, www.usahealthsystem.com/go-teal-and-white.