

Breast and Cervical Cancer

Cervical Cancer: The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2010, about 12,200 cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed in the United States, and about 4,210 women will die as a result. Cervical cancer was one of the most common causes of cancer death for American women. The cervical cancer death rate declined by almost 70% between 1955 and 1992. The main reason for this

change is the increased use of the Pap test. This screening can find changes in the cervix (the lower part of the uterus or womb) BEFORE cancer develops. It can also find early cancer in its most curable stage. The death rate from cervical cancer continues to decline by nearly 4% each year.

The most important risk factor for developing cervical cancer is being

infected with Human Papillomavirus (HPV). This virus is spread through sex with someone who is infected, and comes in two types: one causes genital warts and one causes cervical cancer. The type of HPV that causes cervical cancer does not have any symptoms, so the only way to tell if you have it is through a pap test, which can detect early changes in cells on your cervix that can lead to cancer.

Vaccine to Prevent HPV

The vaccine is called Gardasil. It protects against 70% of the types of HPV that cause cervical cancer and 90% of the types that cause genital warts. The vaccine is for girls ages 9-26. It is best to get vaccinated before becoming sexually active, as the vaccine will not protect against types of HPV that a woman is already infected with. Ask your doctor or call the health department for more information about this vaccine.

Breast Cancer: In 2007, 134 women in Berrien County were diagnosed with breast cancer, and 31 died as a result of it (Michigan Dept. of Community Health). Fortunately, the rates of deaths from breast cancer in Berrien County have been declining somewhat over the past 25 years.

All women should know the following breast health facts:

- Women 20 and up should perform breast self exams monthly
- Women should have yearly mammograms starting at age 40.
- Clinical breast exams should be done yearly by a specifically trained health care provider
- To decrease your risk of developing breast cancer, exercise, eat fruits and vegetables, get adequate rest and don't smoke!
- All women are at risk for breast cancer, but some women have a higher risk: older, post-menopausal women, those with a family history of breast cancer,

(especially before menopause), and those who never gave birth.

Early detection is the key to survival. The five-year survival rate among women whose breast cancer has not spread beyond the breast at the time of diagnosis is 97%. However, that rate drops to below 50% if the cancer has already spread. There are many types of treatments available, so the sooner the cancer is detected, the better the outcome.

*If you find a lump in your breast, don't wait!
Call your provider or the health department right away!*

Getting a mammogram is an extremely important step in early detection of breast cancer. A mammogram is a special x-ray picture of the breast that is able to show problems much earlier than they can be felt by a regular exam.

Women should begin getting mammograms at age 40 and repeat them every two years. If there are symptoms or a strong family history of breast cancer, your doctor may recommend starting earlier.

The Berrien County Health Department offers a program called the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program to assist women in getting breast exams and mammograms if they are over 50 years old, uninsured (meaning no Medicare, HMO or PPO insurance) and meet certain income guidelines. Call the health department to see if you qualify.

