

A publication of the  
**Pinellas County Health Department**

## Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

### Regular Exams Can Help Prevent Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer takes years to develop and grow. This cancer does not form suddenly. First, some cells begin to change from normal to pre-cancer and then to cancer. This can take a number of years although sometimes it happens more quickly.

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of cancer death for American women. But, since 1955 the number of deaths from cervical cancer has declined significantly. The main reason for this change is the use of the Papanicolaou (Pap) test to find cervical cancer early.

While it's true that cervical cancer has been reduced in the U.S., there are still nearly 4,000 deaths from cervical cancer every year. In Florida, 730 new cases of cervical cancer will be diagnosed this year. Most of these women do not get regular Pap tests which can detect most early signs of cervical cancer. In fact, according to the American Cancer Society, more than 60% of women diagnosed with cervical cancer have never had a Pap test.

**Up to 99 percent of cervical cancer cases are linked to the human papilloma virus (HPV), a sexually transmitted infection.** There is a test to detect HPV. While most women infected with HPV will not develop cervical cancer, doctors urge women to be aware of this important **risk factor**, and to get Pap tests regularly.



#### Regular Exams are Essential

Some women think that they do not need pelvic exams or Pap tests once they have stopped having children. This is not true. The pelvic exam may help spot diseases of the female organs. However, it won't find cancer of the cervix at an early stage. To do that, the Pap test is needed.



The Pap test is often done just before the pelvic exam. The doctor will remove cells from the cervix by gently brushing or scraping with a special device. The cells are sent to a lab to be examined under a microscope for abnormal changes.

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women should begin having the Pap test about three years after they start having sex (vaginal intercourse) but no later than 21 years of age. The test should be done every year if the regular Pap test is used, or every two to three years if the newer liquid-based Pap test is used. Either test is okay.

Beginning at age 30, women who have had three normal test results in a row may get the test every two to three years.

Check with your doctor. Women who have certain **risk factors** (HIV infection, weakened immune system) should have a Pap test every year and should possibly be screened for HPV. Check with your doctor for more information regarding risk factors.

Women 70 years or older who have had three or more normal tests in a row (and no abnormal tests in the last 10 years) may choose to stop having the test. Women who have had cervical cancer or who have other risk factors should keep on having the test as long as they are in good health.

Women who have had a total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) for reasons other than having cancer or a precancerous lesion may also choose to stop having the test.



**The Pinellas County Health Department has a FREE Breast & Cervical Cancer Screening Program for women who have low income and are 50 to 64 years of age. This program includes breast and pelvic exam, Pap test, and mammogram. Call us at (727) 824-6917 for info or to make an appointment.**

***Our Vision***  
***Healthier***  
***People in a***  
***Healthier***  
***Environment***

# Pinellas County Health Department

## National Volunteer Blood Donor Month



*Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood.*

The American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), in conjunction with America's

Blood Centers and American Red Cross, launches National Volunteer Blood Donor Month (NVBDM) 2005 to encourage donors to give or pledge to give blood.

Once again, the theme for this year's campaign, "**Give Blood...The Gift of Life**," highlights the importance of giving the gift of life through the donation of blood.

January is usually a difficult month for blood centers to collect blood donations due to fewer people donating during the holidays, poor weather, and more people getting sick. A reduction in turnout can put blood inventory at a critical low. In some parts of the country blood centers are currently on critical appeal.

Most individuals do not realize that donated blood has a short shelf-life (approximately 42 days for Red Blood Cells) which means that our blood supply needs to be constantly replenished. There is a continuing critical need for blood throughout the year, and the challenge is to keep meeting this need every day.

In our community, **Florida Blood Services (FBS)** provides for the blood needs of patients through the generosity of volunteer blood donors. FBS is the third-largest blood transfusion service in the United States. FBS provides more than 650 units of blood to patients in 34 Tampa Bay area hospitals and 80 ambulatory care centers every day.

If you are at least 17 years of age, weigh at least 110 pounds and are in good health, you may be eligible to donate blood. Celebrate National Volunteer Blood Donor Month by "Giving the Gift of Life" and encouraging others to donate as well.

**For more information or to make an appointment to donate blood, visit [www.fbsblood.org](http://www.fbsblood.org).**

## Birth Defects Prevention Month



*Take steps to have a healthier baby.*

Birth defects are abnormal conditions that happen before or after the time of birth. Birth defects are a serious problem. One in 33 babies is born with a birth defect. They are the leading cause of death in children less than one year of age.

Not all birth defects can be prevented since the causes of many birth defects are still unknown. However, there are steps a woman can take to reduce her risk of having a baby with birth defects. Women who may become pregnant should make sure their vaccinations are up to date, and that they are getting the daily recommended dose of 400 milligrams of **folic acid**. Folic acid is found in orange juice and green leafy vegetables or can be taken as supplements in pill form. Women should **also avoid alcohol, tobacco, and street drugs** and eat a healthy, balanced diet.

A pre-pregnancy visit with a health care provider also is recommended. If a woman or her partner has a family history of birth defects, if a woman already had a child with a birth defect, or if a woman is part of a high-risk group (because of age, ethnic background, or medical history), she should discuss these issues with her health care provider.

**For information about planning for a healthy family, contact the Pinellas County Health Department or visit**

**[www.mod.org](http://www.mod.org)**

**(March of Dimes) for more information about birth defects.**



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