



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Mary Ann Foss
Women's Way Program Director
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.2333 or 800.280.5512
E-mail: mfoss@nd.gov

January Is National Cervical Health Awareness Month

Bismarck, N.D. – January is National Cervical Health Awareness Month, and the North Dakota Department of Health is reminding women of the importance of regular pap tests, according to Mary Ann Foss, *Women's Way* Program director.

Although cervical cancer is highly preventable through screening and other preventive measures, about 4,200 women die from the disease in the United States each year. Having a Pap test regularly is the key to preventing cervical cancer. About 50 percent of women who are diagnosed with cervical cancer have never had a Pap test, and an additional 10 percent have not had a Pap test in the last five years.

“Unfortunately, many women do not get regular Pap tests because they are uninsured or underinsured,” Foss said. “The good news is that *Women's Way* may be able to help women pay for their Pap tests.”

The main cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Most people with HPV do not even know they have it because they never have symptoms or problems. Usually the body's immune system will fight off the infection, and it goes away on its own. But sometimes an HPV infection does not go away, and this can cause abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. If that happens, treatment may be needed. If left untreated, these abnormal changes eventually can lead to cervical cancer.

A Pap test can detect the abnormal changes in the cervical cells before they become cancer. If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early when it is easier to treat.

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: health@nd.gov

Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

Women's Way, North Dakota's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, is available to eligible North Dakota women ages 40 through 64. *Women's Way* may provide a way to pay for pelvic exams, Pap test, clinical breast exams and mammograms.

To learn more about *Women's Way* or to see if you are eligible, call 1-800-44 WOMEN or visit www.ndhealth.gov/womensway.

To learn more about cervical cancer or HPV, visit www.cancer.org or www.cancer.gov.

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