January is Cervical Health Awareness Month

***Planned Parenthood* discusses the importance of preventing, detecting and treating cervical cancer.**

News Release

When Sylvia came to Planned Parenthood, she was like many of our patients: a college student in a committed relationship who wanted to be smart about birth control. Sylvia told us she was grateful she could come to our health center and receive compassionate, non-judgmental care even though she couldn't pay for services.

But Sylvia got more than she ever imagined during her visit. One of our clinicians suggested she get a Pap test, a service she had never considered before because she thought she was too young to get cancer. Thankfully, she took the clinician's advice because Planned Parenthood detected Sylvia's early-stage cervical cancer. She was treated immediately and today is a cancer-free mother with a rewarding career. She credits Planned Parenthood with saving her life.

The vast majority of our patients visit Planned Parenthood because they need contraception or testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. What they also receive, though, is education about how to maintain their reproductive and sexual health.

Because of her age, Sylvia's early stage cervical cancer was extremely rare, but the concerns she had were very common, so I'd like to address frequently asked questions about cervical cancer.

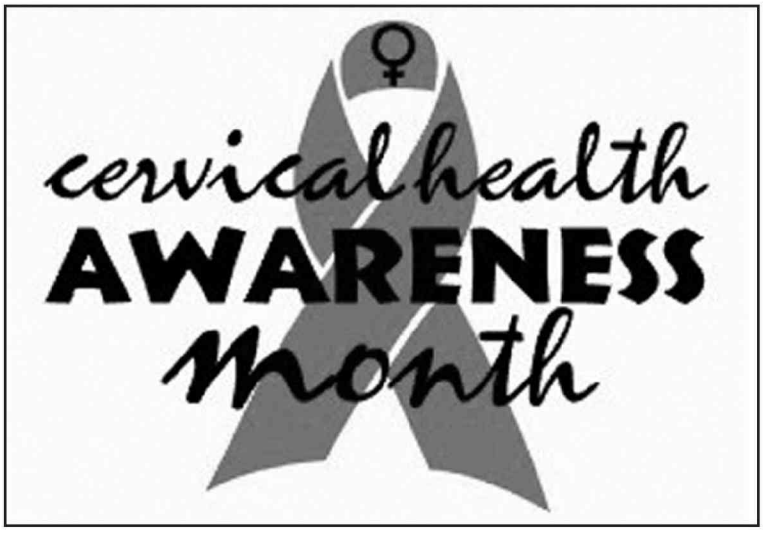

Image Credit: Awarenessmonths.com

What is the most common cause of Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of HPV, or human papillomavirus, a very common sexually transmitted infection. The most common sexually transmitted infection, HPV affects half of all sexually adults at some point in their lives. In most cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally — but high-risk HPV may lead to cervical cancer in some women.

How can a person reduce her risk of HPV?

One of the best ways to prevent the spread of HPV is by getting the HPV vaccine. There are still a lot of myths out there about the vaccine. It's good to ask questions about any medication, but it's also important to remember that the HPV vaccine is safe and effective.

The FDA has approved the vaccine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended it for girls and boys aged 11-12. TheAmerican Cancer Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as Planned Parenthood, support ensuring that all young people get the vaccine.

Medical guidance recommends that both girls and boys get the vaccination when they are 11 to 12 years old because the vaccine works best when people receive it years before they start having sex. But even those who have had sex can benefit from the vaccine; it is available to anyone aged 9-26.

For women over the age of 26, the best way to prevent cervical cancer is to get routine

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Pap tests. And while not routinely given, some people may be candidates to receive the vaccine after age 26 and should talk to their health care provider for more information.

When should a woman get a Pap test?

For women starting at age 21, a key part of prevention of cervical cancer is to get routine Pap tests (on a schedule recommended by your health care provider). This is true even for women who have had the HPV vaccine.

Does the HPV vaccine encourage young people to have sex?

Research shows that young people who get the HPV vaccine are no more likely to have sex than those who don't get vaccinated. As a bonus, the HPV vaccine appointment can give parents an opportunity to talk with their kids about sex and sexual health.

Is HPV contracted exclusively by sex?

A person can be exposed to HPV by having genital skin-to-skin contact just once with someone who has the virus, so it's important to talk with your partner about the importance of being protected and safe.

And while there is no cure for HPV, there is treatment for the abnormal cell changes in the cervix that are caused by HPV, available at Planned Parenthood health centers in our community.

What is the survival rate for women with Cervical Cancer?

Treatment is also available for cervical cancer, which, when caught early, has a nearly 100 percent five-year survival rate. Planned Parenthood health centers can help those who need additional care connect with trusted, quality resources.

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When Sylvia came to Planned Parenthood, cervical cancer was the last thing on her mind. Thankfully, our patients' health is always first on ours.

The idea of getting a Pap test can be frightening, especially if it is one's first exam. But Planned Parenthood health professionals provide low to no-cost care with the warmth and compassion that have made us America's most trusted name in women's health care.

Sylvia was fortunate that her cervical cancer was detected in its earliest stage, but many women aren't as lucky. Each year, more than 12,000 women in the United States die from cervical cancer. If you or someone you know could benefit from a low-to-no-cost cervical cancer screening, please call Planned Parenthood for an appointment at 1.888.743.7526 (PLAN) or visit us online at planned.org.