

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

ISSUE 40, JANUARY 2025

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Happy New Year! As we step into 2025, it's the perfect time to embrace new beginnings and recommit to our health and well-being. January is a month filled with promise, and it's also Cervical Cancer Awareness Month — an opportunity to spread awareness and take action for better health outcomes.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, thanks to early detection and vaccination. Regular screenings, like Pap smears and HPV tests, are essential tools for staying ahead. If you haven't already, schedule your screening and encourage the women in your life to do the same.

In honor of Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, I'm inviting you to take part in a challenge: share at least one piece of cervical cancer awareness information with your family and friends. Whether it's a conversation, a social media post, or sharing resources about screenings and prevention, your voice can make a difference. Together, we can save lives by spreading knowledge.

As we focus on prevention this month, let's also consider wellness as a whole. Here are some ways to make 2025 your healthiest year yet:

- **Move More:** Aim for at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week. Whether it's walking, dancing, or gardening, find something you enjoy and make it part of your routine.
- **Eat Well:** Incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your meals. A colorful plate is not only visually appealing but also packed with nutrients.
- **Know Your Numbers:** Keeping track of your blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, and weight can help you stay on top of your health and prevent potential issues.
- **Reduce Stress:** Take time to breathe, meditate, or engage in activities that bring you peace. Prioritizing your mental health is just as important as caring for your physical health.

By making small, consistent changes, we can build a healthier community together. Remember, wellness is not a destination but a journey, and every step counts.

Let's start this year strong — raising awareness about cervical cancer, supporting one another, and embracing the opportunities that come with a fresh start. Here's to a year of health, hope, and new beginnings!

- Dr. Nolan

O'NEAL COMPREHENSIVE
CANCER CENTER
UAB THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

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Cervical Cancer Spotlight

It's January and the start of a new year! Did you know that is also Cervical Cancer Month Awareness?

Good news! Cervical Cancer can be prevented! You can lower your risk of cervical cancer by getting regular cervical cancer screenings beginning at age 25 and receiving the HPV vaccine. Here some facts and screening guidelines to help you to live a life without cancer:

Cervical cancer develops in a woman's cervix. The cervix is the opening of the womb. It happens when the cells start to change. HPV (Human Papillomavirus Virus) infections cause 90% of cervical cancers in women. It spreads through sexual contact in most cases.

Who Gets Cervical Cancer?

All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It occurs most often in women over the age of 35-44.

Every year about 14,000 women in the U.S. get cervical cancer and about 4,300 women die from it.

What are the Risk Factors?

The Human Papillomavirus virus (HPV) - HPV 16 and HPV 18 - are responsible for most HPV-related cancers. However, not everyone who is infected will develop cancer. HPV is common and half of sexually active people will have HPV at some point in their lives. Most HPV will go away or clear on its own causing little to no symptoms, but if it does not, it may lead to six different cancers including cervical cancer.

- HPV 16 and HPV 18 are responsible for most HPV-related cancers.
- Other risk factors: weakened immune system, smoking, long-term use of birth control pills and giving birth to three or more children, family history.

Prevention of Cervical Cancer

- You can lower your risk of cervical cancer by getting regular cervical cancer screenings (like a Pap Test) and receiving the HPV vaccine.

- Practice safe sex, don't smoke, eat varied diet with fruits and vegetables.

These are important steps you can take to help prevent cervical cancer.

Screening for Cervical Cancer

All women should begin cervical testing (screening) at age 25.

- **Pap Test** - This test looks for changes in the cells of the cervix that can be treated before it turns into cancer. It can also find cervical cancer early, when it's easier to treat. Pap Test every 3 year
- **HPV Test** - This test looks for HPV viruses that can cause cell changes and lead to cervical cancer.

Frequency (ages 25-65):

- Pap Test every 3 years
- HPV/Pap co-test every 5 years
- HPV test every 5 years

If you have an abnormal cervical screening test, it is important that you follow up with your healthcare provider.

For more information, please contact us at coeinfo@uab.edu

NO INSURANCE? You may be able to get free or low-cost screening through the Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. For info to qualify, call 1-800-252-3324 or scan this QR code.



Preventing HPV Cancers

The Office of Community Outreach and Engagement (OCOE) has recently introduced an exciting and impactful educational initiative aimed at combating HPV-related cancers across Macon County. The Preventing HPV Cancers Program is a strategically designed, theory-driven initiative focused on raising awareness and increasing the rates of HPV vaccination in local communities. By equipping local COE County Coordinators with the necessary training, this program has been carefully crafted to be implemented within the OCOE's targeted counties, making it easily accessible to families who may otherwise face barriers to vaccination.

A central component of the program is its series of informative educational sessions, specifically tailored for parents and guardians. These sessions are led by the well-trained county coordinators and serve as an invaluable resource for families. During these sessions, parents are given the opportunity to learn about the critical importance of the HPV vaccine in preventing certain types of cancers. They can explore various healthcare provider options, ask questions, and gain the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about vaccinating their children. These educational events are designed not only to provide essential facts but also to

create an open, supportive environment where families feel empowered to take action regarding their child's health.



What makes the Preventing HPV Cancers Program especially convenient for families is that it culminates in an opportunity for parents to take immediate action. At the conclusion of each session, parents will be given the chance to either schedule an appointment for their child's HPV vaccination or, in some counties, even receive the vaccine on-site. This unique aspect of the program eliminates common logistical challenges that parents may face in accessing vaccination services, such as finding time to make an appointment or coordinating transportation to a healthcare facility.

If you are a parent or guardian and would like to learn more about how you can participate in this life-saving initiative, we encourage you to reach out to your local county coordinator. They can provide you with specific details about upcoming educational sessions, available healthcare providers, and how to take the next steps to ensure your child receives the HPV vaccine. The Preventing HPV Cancers Program is not only a vital step towards safeguarding your child's health, but it also represents a community-wide effort to reduce the future burden of HPV-related cancers in Macon County and beyond.

**CERVICAL
CANCER IS
PREVENTABLE**

HAVE YOU SCHEDULED
YOUR ANNUAL
CHECKUP?

**IT'S YOUR BODY.
TAKE CONTROL.**

For more information:
Email: coeinfo@uab.edu
Phone: (205) 975-0003



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Support Our Patient Assistance Fund: Your Donation Makes a Difference

We invite you to join us in supporting the Patient Assistance Fund through the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement at the UAB O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center. Your generous donation will provide critical resources to patients facing financial hardships, helping them access essential cancer care, medications, and transportation services.

Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a tangible impact on the lives of those in need. Together, we can ease the burden for patients and their families during their cancer journey.

To donate or learn more, please scan the code below or contact our office directly.

Thank you for your support!

