



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

SB 104 Seeks to Reduce Number of Cases in Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY - This year more than 11,070 women across the United States will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and nearly 4,000 women will die of the disease. Women aged 65 and older represent 20% of all new cervical cancer cases, and they are 35% more likely to die of the disease compared to younger women.

Fortunately, cervical cancer is highly preventable through screenings and vaccinations. With that in mind, I have filed Senate Bill 104 this year, which allows female students enrolling in sixth grade in public school to receive, at the option of a parent or guardian, an immunization for the human papillomavirus (HPV). The bill calls on the Department of Health and Senior Services to mail age appropriate information to parents or guardians of female students entering the sixth grade regarding the connection between HPV and cervical cancer and the availability of the HPV immunization.

Cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually-transmitted infection. Most women will have HPV, but few will develop cervical cancer. It is estimated that more than 700 women in Missouri will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year. When found and treated early, this disease is curable.

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved new lifesaving technologies for the prevention of cervical cancer, including an HPV vaccine for primary prevention for girls and women age nine to 26. The HPV vaccine is considered one of the most significant developments in women's health in recent years. The vaccine is not recommended for all women, and it does not prevent all strains of HPV or eliminate the need for annual Pap tests and gynecological exams that screen for cervical cancer.

Older women who have not been screened regularly and recently may be at risk for cervical cancer. HPV tests detect the virus that causes cervical cancer. An HPV test in conjunction with a Pap test in women aged 30 and older is the most effective way to identify women with advanced cervical disease or cancer.

I am hopeful SB 104 will succeed in this new legislative session. The Senate has approved similar legislation during the previous two sessions, but each time the measure has died in the House.

It is important to remember the vaccinations would be entirely voluntary and would be given to a student only with her parents' or guardian's permission. More importantly, each family of a female student entering the sixth grade would receive information about the risk factors for developing cervical cancer, the connection between HPV and cervical cancer, how it is transmitted and how transmission can be prevented, the latest scientific information about the immunization's effectiveness, information about the importance of pap smears, and a statement explaining that questions from parents or guardians may be answered by a health care provider.

Each January as we observe National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, it's important to remind our mothers, sisters, daughters and friends that yearly exams are the best way to prevent cervical cancer. Women should talk to their healthcare provider about the most advanced and appropriate technologies available for cervical cancer and screening.

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