

Week of October 12, 2009



[Website](#) | [Biography](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Multimedia](#)

Early Detection Saves Lives

Breast cancer affects every family in our state. All of us know someone who has either had breast cancer or who has died from it. My mother, Loneta Pearce, died from breast cancer 19 years ago. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think of her and miss her. My hope is that other families will be spared the same kind of loss in their families. That's why early detection is so important in combating breast cancer. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time set aside to educate people about breast cancer risk factors, the importance of regular exams and the diagnosis and treatment of a disease that claims thousands of lives in the U.S. each year.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, aside from skin cancer. The chance of a woman having invasive breast cancer some time during her life is a little less than 1 in 8, and the chance of dying from breast cancer is about 1 in 35. Though the odds are extremely high that you or someone you know has been affected by this disease, the American Cancer Society reports that breast cancer death rates have been going down—in large part thanks to efforts to educate women about the early warning signs of the disease, allowing early diagnosis and effective treatment in many cases.

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 192,370 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among women in the United States in 2009 (approximately 1,910 new cases are expected in men). It also reports that an estimated 40,610 breast cancer deaths are expected in 2009 (40,170 women, 440 men). In Missouri, approximately 4,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 900 will die from the disease in 2009.

The prevalence of breast cancer among Missouri women has led the Missouri General Assembly to bring awareness to the disease through the Show Me Healthy Women

Program. The program aims to reduce the number of breast cancer and cervical cancer cases in our state by providing free breast and cervical cancer screenings to age- and income-eligible women. Early detection is critical when it comes to survival rates and the availability of treatment options. When caught early, the five-year relative survival rate is greater than 95 percent. Show Me Healthy Women provides crucial breast and cervical cancer screenings to women across Missouri who may not otherwise have an opportunity for these services. The program's services are provided at more than 165 sites throughout Missouri by doctors' offices, community health centers, university-based teaching institutions, hospitals and clinics. If you are a woman between the ages of 35 and 64, are uninsured or underinsured and meet the income guidelines, you may be eligible to receive free or low-cost early detection screening services for breast or cervical cancer. You can contact Show Me Healthy Women by phone at 573-522-2845, by e-mail at info@dhss.mo.gov or online at www.dhss.mo.gov/BreastCervCancer to find the nearest provider and learn more about eligibility and making an appointment.

While breast cancer unfortunately cannot be prevented, steps can be taken to decrease your risk and help increase the odds that, if breast cancer occurs, it is caught at an early, more treatable stage. Regular self-exams, mammograms and visits to your doctor can all help with early detection. It's also important to manage the risk factors that are within your control. Although there are several breast cancer risk factors that you cannot adjust—such as gender, age, genetics and family history—you can lower your risk of breast cancer by limiting alcohol use, exercising regularly and keeping a healthy weight. I urge you to make this extra effort—someday it may save your life.

For more information about breast cancer, including resources for breast cancer patients, survivors and caregivers, visit the American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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