

NEWS RELEASE

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

In recognition of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Greene County Family Planning is encouraging all women to talk to their health care providers about breast cancer screening and their personal risk for the disease.

According to the New York State Department of Health, great strides have been made in early detection and treatment of breast cancer, and many women diagnosed with the disease are living long, healthy lives.

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Greene County Family Planning urges women to consult with their health care providers to learn more about the disease, discuss their fears and concerns, and develop an appropriate plan for breast cancer screening. When coupled with new treatment options, early stage diagnosis through mammography screening can significantly improve a woman's chance of survival.

The American Cancer Society and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend beginning yearly mammography at age 40. Other women including those with a family history or other risk factor for breast cancer, or who have any symptoms or changes in their breasts, should talk to their health care provider about what screening schedule is right for them.

Recommendations for when a woman should begin breast cancer screening, and how often a woman should be screened may differ among organizations.

Regardless of these differences, each woman should be aware of her personal risk for breast cancer and decide, with her health care provider, when and how she should be screened for breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in New York State. (*Lung cancer is the leading cause of death.*) On average, more than 14,000 women in New York are newly diagnosed with breast cancer each year, and more than 2,700 women die annually from the disease.

Although the causes of breast cancer are still unknown, the following factors may increase a woman's risk for the disease:

- Advancing age
- Having a first menstrual period at a young age
- Starting menopause at an older age
- Never giving birth or having delayed giving birth to a first child until age 30 or older
- Not breastfeeding
- Having a personal or family history (on the mother's or father's side) of breast cancer, especially early (pre-menopausal) breast cancer
- Having certain gene mutations such as BRCA 1 or BRCA 2
- Being overweight or obese
- Drinking alcoholic beverages (The level of risk rises as the amount of alcohol consumed rises.)
- Being sedentary
- Having a history of radiation exposure to the chest
- Taking hormone replacement therapy for an extended period of time

Even if a woman has one or more of the risk factors for breast cancer, it does not mean she will be diagnosed with the disease. Conversely, many women diagnosed with breast cancer do not have any risk factors or unusual symptoms, which is why screening is important for all women. Those who do have a personal or family history of breast cancer may want to consider genetic counseling to determine if they are at greater risk for developing the disease.

Although research on the causes of breast cancer is ongoing, there are many ways to improve outcomes related to cancer. These include not smoking and avoiding exposure to secondhand smoke, making healthy food choices, getting regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and, specifically for women, breastfeeding their infants and getting recommended cancer screenings.

If you are uninsured or underinsured don't be stopped from getting the preventive screenings you need. The Cancer Services Program of Columbia and Greene Counties helps women access free pap tests, free mammograms, and free clinical breast exams for women age 40 and older. Other tests also available for both men and women. Call 518- 822- 8741 for more information.

Greene County Family Planning offers comprehensive, affordable reproductive health care for teens, women and men. We accept many insurance plans including Medicaid. We also have a sliding fee scale for those who have no insurance coverage. We are conveniently located on the 3rd floor of the Greene County Office Building at 411 Main St., Catskill, NY. To make an appointment for your women's health annual exam please call us at 719-3580.

For more information about breast cancer or visit the New York State Department of Health Web site at <http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/cancer/registry/abouts/breast.htm>.