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Good Morning, I am Dr. Nancy Lee, Associate Director for Science, within the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control of the National Centers for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. I am pleased to be here this morning to discuss how CDC approaches cervical cancer early detection through CDC's, National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP).

Background

Cervical cancer is nearly 100 percent preventable, yet according to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 12,800 new cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed in 1999 with about 4,800 women dying of the disease. The cervical cancer death rate declined 45 percent between the periods 1972-74 and 1992-94 and the overall incidence of the disease has decreased steadily from 14.2 per 100,000 in 1973 to 7.4 per 100,000 in 1995. This is largely attributed to the effectiveness of Pap smear screening for cervical cytology.

Even with this success, there remains significant disparities in the incidence and mortality of cervical cancer among some racial and ethnic minority women, when compared to the rate in white women. The incidence rate for all U.S. women is about 8 per 100,000; however, the highest age-adjusted incidence rate of 43 per 100,000 occurs among Vietnamese women, probably reflecting lack of appropriate screening. Incidence rates of 15 per 100,000 or higher also occur among Alaska Native, Korean, and Hispanic women. The death rate of 6.7 per 100,000 in African American women continues to be more than twice that of whites even though their incidence rate is slightly lower.

Early Detection

Cervical cancer occurs at an average age of 54; however, cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (or CIN), the precursor lesion to cervical cancer, most often occurs in much younger women. For a woman with CIN, her likelihood of survival is almost 100 percent with timely and appropriate treatment. The fact that CIN occurs at a younger age tells us that it usually takes a substantial amount of time for cervical cancer to develop. This means that screening younger women is an important strategy that actually prevents cervical cancer from ever developing. Furthermore, when cervical cancer is detected at its earliest stage, the 5-year survival rate is more than 90 percent.

Risk Factors

Studies that have identified risk factors associated with cervical cancer have shown that cervical cancer is closely linked to sexual behaviors, human papillomavirus (or HPV) infection, immunosuppressive disorders such as HIV/AIDS, as well as a failure to receive regular Pap smear screening. The sexual behaviors specifically associated with greater risk are intercourse at an early age, multiple male sexual partners, and sex with a male partner who has had multiple sexual partners. Experts agree that infection with certain strains of the HPV

is one of the strongest risk factors for cervical cancer, but the most important risk factor for developing cervical cancer, at least from the point of view of what we can do about it, is the failure to receive regular screening with a Pap smear.