

Women Vets Encouraged to Seek Cervical Screening

January is National Cervical Cancer Month. KJ Sloan, Phoenix Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System Women's Veteran Program Manager, wants to remind women of the importance of cervical cancer prevention and the need for pap tests. Sloan says this is especially important for women veterans since women are the fastest growing subgroup of the VA population. "Over the next few years, numbers of women veterans are expected to increase dramatically. This is the direct result of our current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and this segment of the population is at the greatest risk for cervical cancer." For more information, please go to http://www.phoenix.va.gov/pressreleases/2010_1_Cervical_Cancer_NRL.asp. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. In the U.S., the American Cancer Society estimated that in 2009, 11,270 women would be diagnosed with cervical cancer and 4,070 women would die of the disease. Cervical cancer is caused by persistent infections with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection that 3 of 4 adults will have at some time in their lives. Most of these infections go away on their own without treatment. Infections that do not go away on their own can lead to cervical cancer. A Pap test is the traditional method used for cervical cancer screening. An HPV test identifies women who are infected with high-risk types of HPV that could potentially lead to cervical cancer. Clinical studies suggest that screening with both a Pap test and an HPV test offers women aged 30 and older the best protection against cervical cancer. HPV vaccines, recommended for 11- to 12-year-old girls and approved for young women up to age 26, have been shown to be highly effective at preventing infection with the two most common types of HPV that cause approximately 70% of all cervical cancers. HPV vaccination does not protect against all the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer; thus, women who have been vaccinated still need to be screened.