

PRESS RELEASE

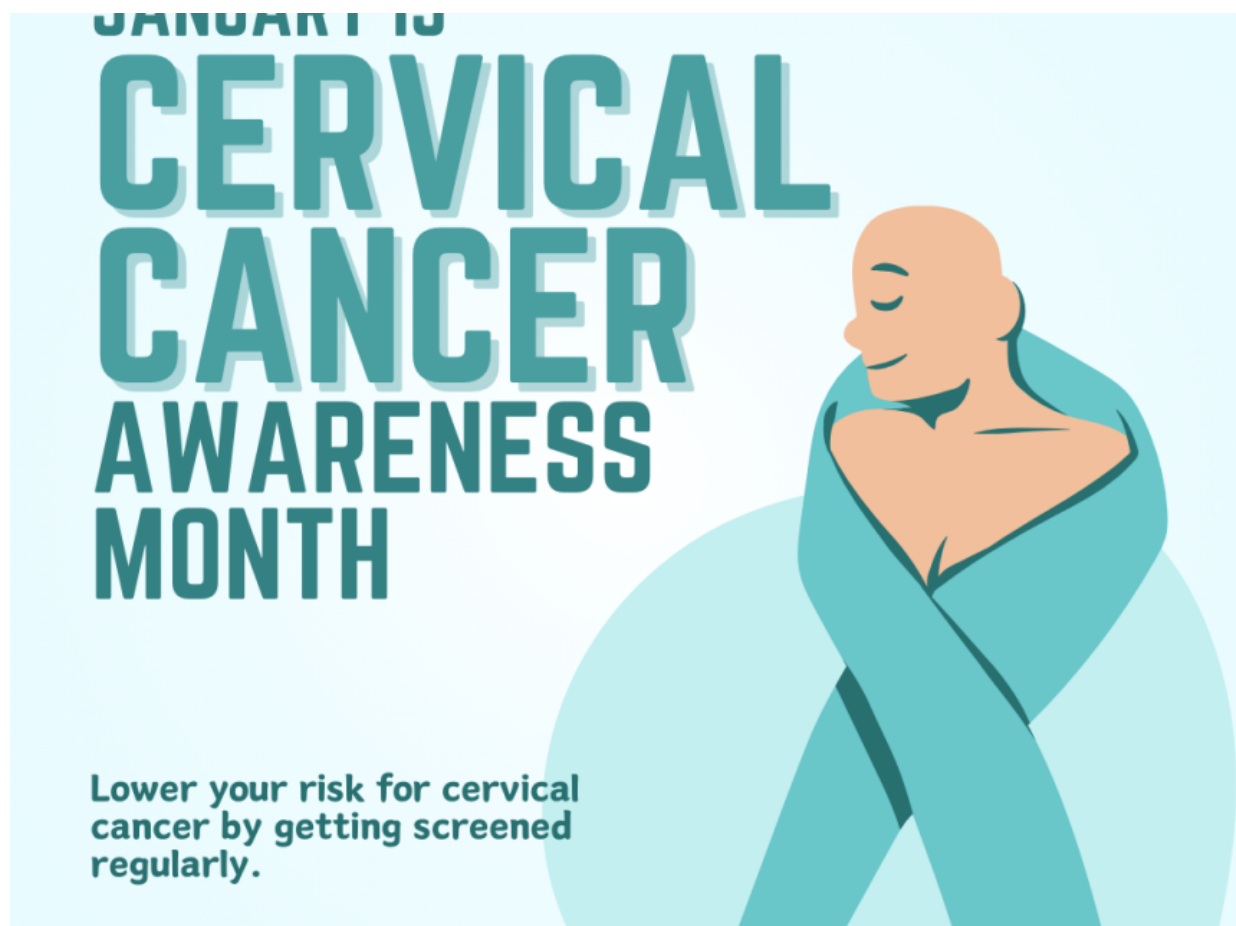
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Early Detection Important for Cervical Cancer Prevention

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Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley has emphasised the significance of screening and early detection of cervical cancer in women.

Honourable Wheatley said the month of January is recognised as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, and his ministry is utilising the observance to emphasise the importance of prevention, early detection, and community education to combat this disease, which continues to impact women worldwide.

Honourable Wheatley said, “Cervical cancer often develops silently in its early stages, making regular screenings essential. Routine tests such as Pap smears can detect precancerous changes in cervical cells, providing a vital opportunity for early detection. Therefore, I am urging women aged 21 to 65, depending on their health history, to schedule regular screenings every three to five years.”

The Minister for Health is encouraging women to get screened even if symptoms seem minor or unrelated. He said early detection saves lives and that regular check-ups and screenings are non-negotiable.

Honourable Wheatley said, Cervical Cancer Awareness Month is more than just an observance; it’s a call to action for the entire BVI community. By promoting vaccination, encouraging screenings, and educating residents about prevention, health officials hope to drastically reduce the impact of cervical cancer. Additionally, Cancer Awareness Advocate, Dr. Arlene T. Penn, has partnered with Unite BVI to offer free screenings until January 31.”

Globally, cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women. In 2022 alone, over 662,000 women were diagnosed, and nearly 350,000 died from the disease, according to the World Cancer Research Fund.

Meanwhile, in the Americas region, more than 78,000 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer and over 40,000 have died from the disease according to the Pan-American Health Organisation. Notably, mortality rates are three times higher in Latin America and the Caribbean compared to North America, underscoring significant health disparities.

Cervical cancer develops in the cells of the cervix, the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vaginal canal. The disease often begins with abnormal cell changes caused by persistent infections with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). While most HPV infections resolve naturally, some persist and lead to precancerous changes that may progress to cervical cancer if left untreated.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to improve the health and social well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands.