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More Adolescents Urged to Get HPV Vaccine During Cervical Cancer Awareness Month
Vaccine Offered at Denver Health Clinics, School-Based Health Centers

DENVER — Each year in the U.S., a new case of cervical cancer is diagnosed every 40 minutes. In Colorado, an average of 150 cervical cancer cases are diagnosed each year, according to the Colorado Cancer Coalition. Most cervical cancer is likely caused by human papillomavirus, or HPV. During Cervical Cancer Awareness Month in January, the Alliance for HPV Colorado—a regional collaborative led by the Public Health Institute at Denver Health—is advising more adolescents roll up their sleeves for the HPV vaccine, which can prevent the many cancers it can cause later in life.

HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact during intercourse. In women, some infections from HPV can persist and lead to cervical cancer. Men can also develop cancers from HPV, including penile, anal, oral and throat cancer. The HPV vaccine prevents more than 90% of these cancers from developing and is recommended for everyone up to the age of 26. Denver Health offers the HPV vaccine at all its community clinics, school-based health centers at Denver Public Schools, and its Immunization and Travel clinic. The vaccine is covered by most insurance plans, and for adolescents who are uninsured, the Vaccines for Children Program can help them receive it at no cost.

"The HPV vaccine wasn't available when I was younger, but if it had been, I certainly would have jumped at the chance to get it," said Laurie Cardin, a Colorado mom and cervical cancer survivor. "I made sure my daughter got it, so she doesn't have to go through what I did. As a mom, I want to encourage my fellow parents to consider the HPV vaccine for their child to prevent future cancers."

For more than 15 years, the HPV vaccine has been studied, monitored, and has been shown to be safe for children with no serious safety concerns or side effects reported. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends all adolescents receive the vaccine when they're 11 or 12 years old but can start the vaccine series as early as age 9 when immune response to the vaccine is the strongest. Those who receive the HPV vaccine before they turn 15 only need two doses. After that age, three doses are required for full protection.

"It may seem odd to vaccinate your child against something that may not impact them until they're older, but what a gift to know your child might not have to endure an HPV-related cancer down the road," said Judith Shlay, MD, MSPH, the associate director of the Public Health Institute at Denver Health and the principal investigator for the Alliance for HPV Free Colorado. "In Colorado, our HPV

vaccination rate among adolescents is critically low, leaving kids vulnerable to HPV and the cancers it can cause in adulthood."

As of June 2022, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reports that 37% of 13–17-year-olds in Colorado have completed the HPV vaccine series. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People goal aims for 80% of adolescents to be vaccinated against HPV by 2030.

About the Alliance for HPV Free Colorado

The Alliance for HPV Free Colorado is a regional collaborative led by the Public Health Institute at Denver Health. The Alliance aims to implement a multidisciplinary approach that results in a sustainable increase in completion of the HPV vaccine series for 9–17-year-olds across Colorado. The Alliance is supported by the Cancer, Cardiovascular and Chronic Pulmonary Disease Grants Program to address cancer. Partners include the Public Health Institute at Denver Health, Jefferson County Public Health, Boulder County Public Health, Weld County Department of Public Health & Environment, Northeast Colorado Health Department, Immunize Colorado, Oral Cancer Consulting and the Adult and Child Consortium for Health Outcomes Research and Delivery Science (ACCORDS).

About Denver Health

Denver Health is a comprehensive health and hospital system that provides high-quality care for all Denver residents, regardless of their ability to pay. We deliver medical care to one-third of Denver's population, proudly serving as the city's safety-net hospital and providing preventive, primary and acute care services. For more than 160 years, Denver Health has been deeply rooted in the health and well-being of the community, providing high-quality clinical care, top-notch education and training for health care workers, and furthering critical research to benefit our patients. We are guided by our mission to serve our community with excellence, compassion, and stewardship as we work to ensure all people have access to the care and programs they need to be happy, healthy and successful.