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FULTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Date: January 11, 2005
To: Area Media
From: Robin Henry, Programs Manager
Re: News Release for Immediate Release

HEALTH DEPARTMENT URGES WOMEN TO PROTECT THEIR HEALTH DURING CERVICAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Dr. Eric Whitaker, state public health director has appointed a 12-member task force to help fight cervical cancer by educating the public about the disease and the virus shown to cause it. "An estimated 750 Illinois women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year and 230 women will die of the disease," said Dr. Whitaker in a December press release.

Cervical cancer, which is almost always caused by human papillomavirus, or HPV, was once the number one cause of death from cancer in women. The Pap test, introduced in the 1950's, is credited with reducing the death rate for cervical cancer by 70 percent. The Center of Disease Control recommends that once a woman has had three consecutive, negative Pap test results within a five year period, the woman may get screened every three years. However, if she falls within the high-risk group, she should get screened annually. Many physicians still prefer that their patients be screened annually.

The Fulton County Health Department is joining other national and local health organizations in promoting January as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. The Pap test is a widely used and effective tool to screen for cervical cancer. It is used to detect changes in the cells of the cervix that may indicate a cancerous or precancerous condition. Regular Pap tests and early treatment is key for good health. Other recommendations include:

- Stop smoking
- Minimize your number of sexual partners. It also helps if your current partner has had a small number of previous partners.
- Use latex condoms, particularly if you or your partner has had previous partners.
- Maintain good personal hygiene

- Have your first Pap smear at age 18 or soon after becoming sexually active, and every year thereafter
- Have regular gynecological checkups, including a Pap smear
- Look out for such warning signs as vaginal discharge, bleeding between periods, bleeding with intercourse, and painful intercourse. Seek medical advice promptly.

Women's Health Clinics of the Fulton County Health Department provide a number of services to the women of the county. Each month Women's Health Clinics and Family Planning clinics provide pelvic and breast exams and pap smears for women no longer needing birth control. Every three months the Fulton County Health Department, in conjunction with Graham Hospital, provides clinic procedures listed above as well as a mammogram screening.

Women's Health programs can also offer financial assistance for pap smears. Certain age, income, and insurance coverage criteria must be met in order to qualify. Income requirements are determined by the household size and gross income. This financial assistance can also extend to cover some additional testing if the pap or mammogram screening indicates there may be a problem.

Persons wanting additional information about the program or to make an appointment for an exam or financial assistance can call the Fulton County Health Department in Canton – 309-647-1134, ext. 244 (Mon-Fri 8AM to 4PM) or in Astoria – 309-329-2922 (Mon-Wed 8AM – 3PM).