

# Women's Health Check in Idaho

Dana Bezdeka, R.N. Coordinator of Women's Health  
Southeastern District Health Department

---

Moms, aunts, sisters, spouses, and best friends are encouraged to visit a health care professional to receive preventive services and screenings can help women detect cervical or breast cancer early. Since many of the leading causes of death among women can be successfully prevented or treated if the warning signs are caught early enough, a reminder from loved ones to get a regular health check-up is one of the nicest gifts a woman can receive.

The top three causes of death among women are heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Heart disease is the number one killer of American women and, in fact, more women die of heart disease each year than do men. Cancer is the second leading cause of death, with lung cancer being the top cancer killer among American women followed by breast cancer and colorectal cancer.

According to Health and Human Services, maintaining regular check-ups, being physically active, eating a healthy diet, not smoking, and following general safety rules are five health habits for improving women's health. In 2004, Idaho had the lowest mammography screening rate among all the state in the United States for women ages 40 and over. In addition, Idaho also had the second lowest cervical cancer screening rate in the U.S.

What is keeping women from getting this crucial screening? Lack of resources. There are resources available for both breast and cervical cancer screening. Through Women's Health Check (WHC), a federally funded program, it will reimburse enrolled women for breast and cervical cancer screening services. To qualify, women must meet these WHC eligibility criteria:

- Low income (<200% Federal Poverty Level)
- No health insurance coverage for Pap tests or mammograms
- Age 50-64 for Pap test, clinical breast exam and mammogram or
- Age 40 -49 for Pap test
- Women over age 65 who are NOT eligible for Medicare or cannot afford Medicare Part B
- Limited enrollment and services available for uninsured women who meet these additional criteria:
  - Age 30 – 49 and have symptoms suspicious of breast cancer confirmed by a health care professional
  - Age 30 – 39 and have symptoms suspicious of cervical cancer confirmed by a health care professional

Last year, WHC provided screening and diagnostic services for nearly 4,000 Idaho women, of which 49 were diagnosed with cancer through the program and were able to be enrolled in Breast and Cervical Cancer (BCC) Medicaid to pay for cancer treatment. Women must be screened and/or diagnosed through WHC (and be a U.S. citizen or resident alien) to be eligible for BCC Medicaid treatment.

What can help women get screened? A referral from their physician. Family Practice physicians play a key role in providing quality clinical breast exams, pelvic exams, obtaining specimens for pap tests, and referring patients for mammograms, as appropriate. If a nurse schedules a mammogram, the patient may be more likely to follow through with the appointment. Standards of care require a clinical breast exam within 60 days of a mammogram.

Some women need certain screening tests earlier, or more often, than others. During their check-ups, women should discuss with their health care professionals which of the tests are right for them, when they should have them.

For more information about how to enroll, contact Dana Bezdeka, 239-5232, or Katina Terry, 239-5290 or call the Idaho CareLine, 2-1-1 (1-800-926-2588). Please visit our website at [www.sdhdidaho.org](http://www.sdhdidaho.org).