Cervical Cancer Death Rates Alarmingly High Among Black Women in Alabama

In this state, Black women die of this preventable cancer at nearly double the rate of white women.

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Although cervical cancer is a preventable and highly curable disease, a new report released by Human Rights Watch reveals that Black women in Alabama are dying of this cancer at more than twice the national average, reports The Guardian.

Cervical cancer was once a major cause of death for American women, but the advent of the Pap smear as a form of cancer screening led to a significant decrease in mortality rates.

In the United States, cervical cancer kills 2.4 women per 100,000, about 4,200 women annually. The rate in Alabama is 3.9 per 100,000. But Black women in the state die at almost double the rate of white women: 5.2 per 100,000 compared with 2.7 per 100,000 white women.

Alabama's restrictive health insurance policies, scarcity of physicians, poverty and structural racism are responsible for the high mortality rate among African-American women, according to the Human Rights Watch.

What's more, deaths from cervical cancer in Alabama have increased 34.5 percent from 2010 and 2014, which points to a worsening problem.

The report also highlights four points of intervention that could help prevent, treat and cure cervical cancer: vaccination, screening, timely follow-up and early treatment.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is "a first layer of defense against cervical cancer," the Human Rights Watch notes. This is because most cases of cervical cancer are caused by infection with HPV, a common virus spread through sexual contact. Gardasil 9 is the only available HPV vaccine in the country.

Routine screening helps identify cervical cells that could develop into cancer, while timely follow-ups mean potentially dangerous cells can be removed before they can mutate into cancer. Finally,

early detection can lead to prompt and effective treatment, usually resulting in a high survival rate.

But Human Rights Watch says Alabama must fix its failing health system in order to make strides in the prevention of cervical cancer deaths among its Black population.

This begins with ensuring that women and girls have access to preventive services and quality sexual and reproductive health information at each intervention point in order to decrease their risk of cervical cancer.

Click here to learn how Black women have worse breast cancer outcomes despite receiving similar treatment.

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