

Facts about HPV Vaccine and Cervical Cancer



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Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine protects girls from developing cervical cancer in adulthood. Overwhelming scientific evidence has shown that HPV vaccine is safe and effective.

High vaccine uptake is essential to the success of the HPV school vaccination programme. However, uptake rates have fallen in recent years. This is of great concern to all those involved in cancer prevention.

Teachers can support this life-saving vaccination programme and provide accurate information about the vaccine to students.

Please read these facts about HPV vaccine and cervical cancer.

Human papillomavirus (HPV)

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is spread by direct (usually sexual) contact with an infected person.
- About 80% of all women will have a HPV infection in their lifetime, usually in their late teens and early 20s.
- Most HPV infections clear naturally but some caused by high-risk HPV types can progress to cervical cancer.
- Two high-risk HPV types (16 and 18) cause over 70% of cervical cancers.

Cervical cancer

- Ireland has one of the highest rates of cervical cancer in Western Europe.
- Each year in Ireland
 - over 90 women die from cervical cancer
 - over 280 (many young) women need treatment (surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy) for invasive cervical cancer
 - over 6,500 women need hospital treatment for a precancerous form of cervical cancer.

HPV vaccine

- There are three licensed HPV vaccines HPV2, HPV4 and HPV9.
- HPV vaccine is recommended by international and national bodies including
 - the World Health Organization
 - the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
 - the US Centers for Disease Control
 - all 69 US designated National Cancer Centers
 - the American Society for Clinical Oncology
 - the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland
 - the Irish Cancer Society
- The HPV vaccine used in the HSE school HPV vaccination programme is HPV4 (Gardasil).

Gardasil

- provides protection against
 - two high-risk HPV types (HPV 16 and 18) that cause 70% of cervical cancers and precancers
 - two HPV types that cause 90% of genital warts.
- has been licensed worldwide since 2006.
- is used in over 25 European countries, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- 227 million doses have been distributed worldwide.
- over 690,000 doses have been distributed in Ireland and more than 230,000 girls have received the full vaccine course.

Safety of HPV vaccines

- All vaccines must go through extensive safety testing before they are licensed.
- Once in use, vaccine safety is continually monitored to identify side effects caused by the vaccine.
- Any medical 'event' reported after vaccination is analysed to see if it is caused by the vaccine.
- The European Medicines Agency, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization continue to say HPV vaccines are safe with no known long-term side effects.

Ongoing analysis has shown there is no scientific evidence linking HPV vaccines to any long-term medical condition.

HPV vaccine side effects

The known side effects are:

- About 1 girl in 10 will get pain, swelling and redness at the injection site and/or headache.
- About 1 girl in 100 will get nausea, pain in the vaccinated arm and mild fever.
- About 1 girl in 1,000 to 1 girl in 10,000 will get an itchy rash or hives.
- Severe allergic reactions with difficulty breathing are very rare (about 1 in 1 million patients).
- Occasionally girls faint after getting an injection. The girls are advised to sit down for 15 minutes after the vaccination. This helps prevent fainting.