

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (HPV) VACCINE

FACT SHEET

Introduction

Cancer of the cervix is the most common cancer among women worldwide (WHO 2006). It is estimated that the prevalence of HPV infection among the general female population in Eastern Africa is 33%, compared to 11% in the rest of the world. In Uganda cancer of the cervix accounts for 80% of all female cancers and 40% in the Kampala cancer registry. Fortunately cancer of the cervix can be prevented through:

- Immunisation with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine
- Screening
- Early treatment
- Sexual behavior change

The World Health Organisation (WHO) promotes this comprehensive approach towards the prevention of cancer of the cervix.

What is cancer of cervix?

The abnormal and uncontrolled growth of cells in the cervix resulting in wounds and bleeding. This cancer usually spreads to other parts of the body.

Causes of cancer of the cervix

Cancer of the cervix is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are over 200 types of HPV. Type 16 and 18 account for 70% of all cervical cancer cases worldwide. HPV also causes vaginal, vulvar and anal cancers while HPV type 6 and 11 are responsible for genital warts.

Introduction of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine

The Ministry of Health has chosen to introduce the Quadrivalent Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine that targets HPV type 6, 11, 16 and 18 to be used for nationwide scale up immunisation against cancer of the cervix.

Mode of transmission of HPV

HPV is transmitted through sexual contact. Anyone who has any kind of sexual activity involving genital contact with a person infected with HPV is at risk of HPV infection.

Risk factors for HPV infection

- Sexually active girls/women
- Girls who have sexual intercourse for the first time at an early age
- Girls/Women with multiple sex partners Girls/Women with other genital infections
- Girls/Women with weakened immune systems (e.g. HIV/AIDS) may also be at risk of HPV infection

Signs and Symptoms of cervical cancer

You can get HPV without even knowing it because the virus often has no signs or symptoms.

In a small percentage of people, high-risk HPV types may persist, allowing them to cause cell changes that may lead to cancer.

The symptoms of cancer of the cervix appear only when the cancer has reached the advanced stage and may include the following:

- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Lower abdominal pain
- Bleeding during intercourse
- Inter-menstrual bleeding
- Heavy menstrual bleeding
- Abnormal vaginal discharge with a bad smell

Prevention of cancer of the cervix

Primary prevention of HPV infection through:

- Immunisation with HPV vaccine
- Abstinence
- Avoiding having sex at an early age
- Having one sexual partner

Secondary prevention of cancer of the cervix:

- Screening
- Early treatment of pre-cancerous lesions

Where to find cancer of the cervix screening services

Screening services can be accessed at hospitals and selected health facilities

Safety of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine

There are no known serious side effects linked to the HPV vaccine, apart from pain and swelling which may occur at the injection site. If swelling occurs do not massage.

Number of Doses for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine

Following the evidence from the World Health Organization, the Ministry of Health has chosen a two dose schedule. The first dose will be given at first contact of an eligible girl and the second will be given 6 months after the first dose.



Girls of Kabakazi P/S Nakasongola district who completed their HPV vaccination displaying their cards

This vaccine will be administered by injection in the upper arm

What is the Target group for the HPV Vaccine

It is best to immunise girls before the onset of any sexual activity. Majority of girls who are at least 10 years of age are less likely to be sexually exposed.

The HPV immunisation will target all 10 year old girls in and out of school.

Where will girls be immunised from

The girls will be immunised at schools or at all health facilities and outreach posts currently providing routine immunisation services. All health facilities should map all primary schools in their catchment area to provide HPV immunisation services either through the health facility or outreaches.



Girls of Wabinyoyi P/S Nakasongola district waiting to receive the HPV vaccine

Key messages:

- In Uganda, cancer of the cervix is the most common cancer among women.
- Cancer of the cervix is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which is sexually transmitted
- Engaging in sexual activity at an early age, having multiple sexual partners are some of the risk factors that lead to cancer of the cervix
- Regular screening to check for pre-cancerous lesions that could be treated early is a cost effective preventive measure against cancer of the cervix
- Cancer of the cervix can be treated if detected early
- HPV vaccine rollout is another preventive intervention for preventing cancer of the cervix
- All 10 year old girls in and out of school will be immunised against cancer of the cervix using the HPV vaccine
- All eligible girls must receive two doses to get maximum protection against cancer of the cervix
- After the first dose, the second dose will be given 6 months after
- The HPV vaccine will be given at all health facilities and outreaches currently providing routine immunization.
- HPV vaccine is available in all public and private facilities that carry out routine immunisation.
- The HPV vaccine protects against other types of diseases and cancers caused by HPV: genital warts, vaginal cancer and vulvar cancer
- The HPV vaccine is **SAFE, EFFECTIVE** and **FREE** and is approved by the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF