**Human Papillomavirus (HPV)**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

National Government Health has introduced the HPV vaccine. This vaccine is currently available around the world and has been available through the private industry in South Africa for the last three years.

HPV is a viral infection that can cause cervical cancer. This vaccination **prevents** the infection of HPV in girls.

All grade 4 girls from 9 years in public and special education schools will be vaccinated via the school-health system.

The vaccination is administered by injection in two doses six months apart.

Parents must sign consent forms

Make sure your daughter is at school when the immunisation team comes.

Facts about cancer of the cervix in South Africa:

* Cancer of the cervix is the second most prevalent cancer in women in South Africa.
* HPV is 100% responsible for cervical cancer – the most virulent strains of HPV are 16 and 18, and it accounts for 70% of all cervical cancers.
* Ceravix® is the vaccination that will be used. It needs to be administered twice with a six-month interval between dosages.
* Girls must receive BOTH dosages to ensure affectivity. If a girl did not receive the first dose in February / March, she will not be given a vaccination during the second round in October.
* The vaccine is most effective if administered at 9 years of age.
* There are almost no or only very mild side effects.
* The safety of the vaccination has been verified over and over again. There have been only two adverse events in the Western Cape, both were attributed to other factors, (vomiting due to fear; fainting due to anaemia).

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

1. **Why do Western Cape Government Health and virtually all other governments vaccinate individuals?**

Vaccines are given to prevent disease later on. If enough people get the vaccine, and there is no incidence of an illness for a long time, the illness is considered eliminated, this is the case with small pox.

1. **What is HPV?**

HPV stands for Human Papillomavirus. It is an extremely common virus and it is estimated that approximately 80% of women will be infected with the virus during their life.

1. **Why will there be a HPV vaccine mass campaign?**

Every day in South Africa eight women die of cervical cancer (cancer of the womb). HPV causes cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine will prevent cervical cancer from developing in the cervix or womb.

1. **How do women get HPV?**

The virus is spread by skin-on-skin contact during sex. Any woman engaging in sexual activity, even if she has only one partner throughout her life, can contract HPV. It is for this reason that husbands and fathers should encourage their wives to have their cervical screening (Pap smear, which can detect HPV and cancer) and ensure that their daughters are vaccinated against HPV.

1. **Can HPV be treated?**

No. There are no antivirals that can treat HPV.

1. **How is it responsible for cancer of the cervix?**

HPV has 52 strains or types of which ± 15 are oncogenic (cancer causing). Of these 15 strains, two – HPV strains 16 and 18 – are found in 70% of all cervical cancer.

HPV causes cancerous cells to develop on the upper layers (called the cylinder epithelial) of the cervix. If left unchecked, the cells will grow into cancer, which will spread into the uterus and can spread to any other area of the body.

When a healthy woman is infected with HPV, it can take anywhere between 10 to 20 years for cancer to develop. This is why we encourage women to have a cervical screening (Pap smear) every five - ten years as from 30 years of age.

A cervical screening is designed to diagnose pre- and cancerous cells so that treatment can be discussed with the patient.

1. **Why will the vaccine only be given to girls in grade 4?**

The vaccination is most effective at this age. As with most vaccines, such as those that we administer at birth, the younger the person is when they receive vaccination, the better the uptake (seroconversion or immune response) by the body.

The other reason is that after research it has been established that this is the group of young girls where the distribution of a limited number of vaccines can have the highest health benefits in the future.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that girls from 9 years should receive the HPV vaccine before they become sexually active one day. Clinical trials have shown that the HPV vaccine is more effective if the girl is younger.

Each vaccine costs R153 and each grade 4 girl who is already 9 years old, will receive two doses of the vaccine, six months apart.

Should you wish to vaccinate your daughter and she is not part of the group, please speak to your GP or pharmacist about vaccination.

1. **How is the vaccine given or administered?**

The vaccine is injected into the upper arm.

1. **What is in the vaccine? Will it make my child ill?**

The vaccine has been extensively tested and has been in use in many other countries, including, Australia, UK, USA and India, to mention a few. There have been no major adverse (unexpected) events attributed to the vaccination.

As with all vaccinations, some children may experience some bruising or redness at the vaccination site. In very few cases, some girls have reported vomiting and nausea, although this seems to be a nervous reaction at the thought of being injected rather than a response to the vaccine!

The vaccine contains no elements that can alter sexual behaviour, fertility, menstrual onset, weight gain or loss.

1. **What do parents have to do to ensure that their grade 4 daughters who are 9 years old at the time of vaccination will be vaccinated?**

Western Cape Government Health staff will be visiting all public and special schools to vaccinate all grade 4 girls who are 9 years old already. Like with all vaccinations done at schools, parents will receive a consent form from the school that must be signed by the parent or guardian of the child and then returned to the school.

Parents or caregivers must ensure that their girls are at school on the vaccination days.

**If the signed consent form has not been returned to the school, the child will not be vaccinated.**

1. **Who do I contact if I have not received a consent form from the school?**

Please contact your child’s school if you have not received consent form.

1. **My daughter will turn 9 in March, but the vaccination team will be coming before her birthday – does she still qualify for the vaccination?**

The only children being vaccinated during this campaign are GIRLS in grade 4 who are 9 years old already. Even if your daughter only turns 9 the week after we have visited the school, we will not vaccinate her. Only those that are 9 and are going to be turning 10 will receive the vaccination.

No child under the age of 9 years will be vaccinated, even if they are in grade 4. However, girls who will turn 9 after the campaign will receive their first vaccine during the second round and their second dose during the first round of 2017.

If your child is over 9 years old, and in grade 4 she will receive a vaccination during this campaign.

1. **Will the vaccine encourage my child to become sexually active earlier than she would have without the vaccine?**

No. The vaccine has nothing to do with sexual activity. The vaccine just protects your daughter from developing cervical cancer much later in life.

1. **Will my daughter still be able to fall pregnant one day?**

Yes. There is nothing in the vaccine that can affect fertility in any way.

1. **My daughter is HIV positive. Can she still have the vaccine?**

Yes. She will automatically be vaccinated as part of the school groups. The vaccine is safe for HIV positive people.

1. **Will my daughter still need cervical screening (Pap smear), when she is older?**

Yes. Remember, the vaccine only protects against the two most common strains of HPV, strains 16 and 18, which account for 70 % of cervical cancer. There are other, less prevalent strains that can cause cervical cancer.

Remember that the vaccine does not protect against other sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia and other harmful infections related to sexual activity. So it is important to use condoms and practice safe sex.

1. **When is the campaign planned for?**

**Round 1**: 17 February 2016 – 11 March 2016

**Round 2**: 10 August – 6 September 2016

1. **When will the vaccine be made available to the general public?**

The vaccine is already available for purchase in the private industry. Most medical aids now pay for the vaccine. However, if you do not have a medical aid and need to pay, it will be cheaper to have this done at a pharmacy that also has a wellness nurse. Please discuss this with your pharmacist.