

Extensive evaluation of scientific studies confirms HPV vaccine safety

06 March 2018: The National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance (NCIRS) has undertaken an extensive evaluation of the human papillomavirus virus (HPV) vaccines in use globally, confirming their excellent safety profile and will continue to monitor the vaccine.

Four out of five people will be infected with HPV in their lifetime; this infection can lead to cancer and other diseases. HPV vaccine protects against cervical and other cancers and is recommended for routine vaccination at age 12-13 years. It is delivered primarily through free, school-based immunisation programs. In 2018, a new HPV vaccine, Gardasil[®]9, which protects against additional HPV types, will be used in Australia. AusVaxSafety, Australia's national active vaccine safety surveillance system, will monitor Gardasil[®]9 safety from 2018 to accompany this change to the National Immunisation Program (NIP). AusVaxSafety is led by NCIRS and predominantly uses the SmartVax survey tool to gather feedback from recently vaccinated Australians.

In recent years, misinformation about the safety of HPV vaccine has affected confidence in vaccination, which in turn has reduced the number of young people being vaccinated in some countries. Importantly, Australia continues to have one of the highest vaccination coverage rates for HPV vaccine globally, with approximately three quarters of young males and females taking up the vaccine to be protected against cancer.

Our extensive review of HPV vaccine safety examined 109 studies including 15 population-based studies in over 2.5 million vaccinated individuals across six countries. The findings built on an earlier review of over 100 earlier studies. Key insights from this review include:

- There is a large amount of information on HPV vaccines, but the information is of variable quality. High quality, well-conducted scientific studies confirm that the vaccine is safe
- Evidence shows HPV vaccine is very safe overall. It doesn't increase the risk of developing nervous system or autoimmune conditions

The incoming Director of NCIRS and paediatric infectious disease specialist Professor Kristine Macartney says, "Prevention of cervical and other HPV-related cancers is vital worldwide. Our thorough review of all current studies confirms the safety of this life-saving vaccine. Our findings align with reports from the World Health Organization and many other experts that have deemed HPV vaccines to be 'extremely safe'". In addition, AusVaxSafety will provide real time feedback from vaccinated adolescents at select sites across Australia to continue to track safety as Gardasil9 is rolled-out.

Co-author Associate Prof Julia Brotherton, Medical Director of the National HPV Vaccination Program Register, agrees that the review reinforces the known safety of the vaccine, saying "The high levels of uptake we have achieved with this vaccine shows that Australian parents do want their kids to be protected against HPV and the cancers it can cause. We have more than 10 years of experience now showing that parents are right in confidently choosing to vaccinate their kids in our world leading school based programs."

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About NCIRS: The National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance of Vaccine Preventable Diseases (NCIRS) is the leading organisation in Australia working in research to support evidence-based policy development for evaluation of the National Immunisation Program, and surveillance of vaccine preventable diseases, vaccine coverage and vaccine safety. This work is funded through agreements with the Australian Government Department of Health. For more information on NCIRS visit www.ncirs.edu.au



About VCS: The Victorian Cytology Service (VCS), who operate the National HPV Vaccination Program Register on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Health, is a health promotion charity with a vision to prevent cancer and infectious disease through excellence in the provision of public health services supporting screening and vaccination. www.vcs.org.au

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