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To: General Practitioners & Practice Nurses

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Subject: Important information for practice nurses and doctors

Dear Colleague

Addition of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to the National Immunisation Programme and the HPV Immunisation Programme for girls age 12-18 years.

The Prime Minister has announced funding for the HPV Immunisation Programme. The HPV vaccine will be added to the National Immunisation Schedule for year 8 girls from 2009. A catch-up programme will be delivered over two years for girls born on and after 1 January 1990. The programme will start from 1 September 2008, for the ages specified below.

Gardasil is the vaccine that will be used.

Some questions and answers about the programme are attached. More comprehensive questions and answers are in the immunisation section of the Ministry of Health's website (www.moh.govt.nz).

National Immunisation Schedule

From 2009, the vaccine will be part of the National Immunisation Programme for Year 8 (12 to 13 year old girls). The vaccine will be delivered through school based programmes, primary care and health clinics.

Catch-up Programmes

The catch up programme will be in two phases:

- Primary Care: Initially, from 1 September 2008 the catch up programme will focus on older girls, aged 17 and 18 (born in 1990 and 1991) through primary care services.
- School Based Programmes: These will start from 2009 for girls aged 12-18 years.

District Health Boards will be planning HPV Immunisation Programmes and the details of these programmes (including the mode of delivery in the South Island) will be available later.

National Immunisation Register (NIR) and School Based Vaccination System (SBVS)

The NIR and the SBVS will be used to record HPV immunisations. The SBVS will message immunisation events to the NIR.

Claiming the Immunisation Benefit

The claiming of immunisation benefits for HPV will be made through the standard HealthPAC claiming process. The benefit will be the same as that paid for other National Immunisation Schedule vaccines.

Communication

Resources for health professionals and training materials are being developed. Health education materials are being planned for girls, parents and schools.

More Details

Details about HPV and the vaccine are available on the Ministry of Health website (www.moh.govt.nz). More information about the programme and how it will be delivered in your area will be sent out when local details have been finalised.

If you have any questions in the meantime, you can email them to the HPV Project Team (HPV@moh.govt.nz).

Yours sincerely

Dr Alison Roberts
Senior Advisor Public Health Medicine
Ministry of Health

HPV Immunisation Programme Questions and Answers.

When does the HPV Immunisation Programme start?

From 1 September 2008, the vaccine will be available for free to young women aged 17 and 18 from their family doctor or practice nurse, or health clinic.

From early 2009, it will be available to all girls and young women from the age of 12 to 18. Most will get the vaccine at school. More details will be released once consultation has been completed and local plans are finalised.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given by injection in the upper arm. Three injections are given over a 6-month period:

1st injection

2nd injection 1-2 months after the first dose

3rd injection 4-6 months after the first dose.

Gardasil contains highly purified VLPs of each HPV type, sodium chloride, and very small amounts of aluminium-containing adjuvant to enhance the immune response and stabilisers (histidine and polysorbate 80). The vaccine does not contain thiomersal. The vaccine should be stored at +2°C to +8°C and should not be frozen.

What is HPV (human papillomavirus)?

HPV is the name for the types of viruses that cause certain types of cancer and warts. Different types of HPV affect different parts of the body, including the cervix.

HPV types that cause warts do not lead to cancer.

The human papillomavirus is spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has the virus.

Most women who develop HPV infections clear the virus naturally and do not develop cervical cancer.

How effective is the vaccine, and how long does it last?

Gardasil vaccine targets HPV types 16 and 18, which are responsible for most cases of cervical cancer and HPV type 6 and 11 that cause genital warts.

Clinical trials show Gardasil is highly effective in preventing these types of HPV in young women who have not previously been exposed to them.

So far, ongoing studies show the vaccine protects against HPV infection for five years after immunisation, and suggest protection will last much longer.

Research is continuing to find out how long protection will last.

Gardasil does not protect against all HPV types that can cause cervical cancer. And, as with any vaccine, Gardasil may not provide protection for everyone who is vaccinated.

All women should have regular cervical smear tests every three years from the age of 20 until they turn 70 if they have ever been sexually active.

Are there any groups who should not get HPV vaccine, or should wait?

There are a few people for whom the vaccine is not recommended, including:

- anyone who has ever had a life-threatening reaction to yeast, or any other component of Gardasil
- anyone who has any severe allergies – these people should check with their doctor first

- pregnant women. The vaccine appears to be safe for both the mother and the unborn baby, but this is still being studied. Pregnant women who inadvertently receive the vaccine do not need to consider terminating the pregnancy
- people with moderate or severe illnesses should wait until they recover to receive their HPV immunisation.

Women who are breastfeeding may safely get the vaccine.

People who are mildly ill can still get their immunisation as scheduled.

How safe is the vaccine?

The vaccine was shown to be safe during large clinical trials in which more than 11,000 young women from 13 countries received the vaccine. The trials found that Gardasil was safe and caused no serious side effects.

After the injection, some girls and women developed injection site pain. This reaction is common but mild. Any injection can cause a mild fever, redness or swelling at the injection site.

Gardasil has been licensed for use in more than 100 countries, including New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and the 27 countries in the European Union including the U.K.

Can boys be vaccinated?

The research into the effectiveness of the vaccine in preventing HPV infection and related diseases in boys and men has not been completed. For now, free HPV immunisation is only available to girls.

More information about the HPV Immunisation Programme

More information about the programme is at www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.

If you have queries about the HPV Immunisation Programme please contact:

- the Ministry of Health HPV Immunisation Project Team by email: hpv@moh.govt.nz (cleared daily),