

HPV vaccine to be provided under Childhood Immunisation Programme

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (October 11) announced that starting from the 2019/20 school year, eligible female primary school students of suitable ages will be provided with human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme (HKCIP) to prevent cervical cancer.

The new initiative is launched on the recommendations jointly made by the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases (SCVPD) and the Scientific Committee on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (SCAS) under the CHP to incorporate HPV vaccine into the HKCIP.

"After reviewing the latest scientific evidence on effectiveness and safety, the World Health Organization (WHO)'s recommendations, overseas practices, local studies on acceptability and cost-benefit analyses, the two scientific committees reached a consensus to recommend that HPV vaccination be included in the HKCIP as a public health programme for cervical cancer prevention for girls of suitable ages before sexual debut," a spokesman for the CHP said.

The recommended vaccination schedule consists of two doses of HPV vaccines. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the first dose of HPV vaccine will be given via outreach by the DH's School Immunisation Teams to Primary Five female students at their schools, and a second dose will be given to the girls when they reach Primary Six in the following school year. This mode of delivery has all along achieved a high coverage of vaccines under the HKCIP.

Nine-valent HPV vaccine will be provided under the programme. It is estimated that this vaccine, which covers major genotypes accounting for cervical cancer cases in Hong Kong, could potentially offer protection against around 90 per cent of cervical cancer in Hong Kong.

"We are working out the implementation details of the vaccination programme," the spokesman said.

Persistent infection with high-risk types of HPV through sexual contact can cause cervical cancer. In 2015, cervical cancer was the seventh most common cancer among females in Hong Kong with 500 new cases recorded, accounting for 3.3 per cent of all new cancer cases in females. In 2016, cervical cancer was the ninth leading cause of female cancer death, with 151 deaths recorded and accounting for 2.6 per cent of all cancer deaths in females.

In recent years, there has been increasing scientific evidence showing that HPV vaccines are safe and efficacious in preventing infection with HPV

genotypes covered by the vaccines, which account for the majority of cervical cancer cases. The WHO recommends that HPV vaccine be included in national immunisation programmes as part of a co-ordinated and comprehensive strategy to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases caused by HPV.

The Government commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a cost-benefit study on HPV vaccination in the prevention of cervical cancer, which was completed in mid-2018. The study concluded that routine HPV vaccination of female adolescents in Hong Kong is highly likely to be cost-beneficial and cost-effective.

The spokesman reminded the public that HPV vaccination cannot provide a 100 per cent protection against cervical cancer and should not be used to replace cervical cancer screening. Hence, regular cervical cancer screening remains an important measure for prevention of cervical cancer.

Under the HKCIP, eligible children can currently receive different types of free vaccines and boosters for the prevention of 11 types of infectious diseases, namely chickenpox, diphtheria, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pertussis, poliomyelitis, pneumococcal infection, rubella, tetanus and tuberculosis. Vaccines are first given to newborn babies in hospitals. During their pre-school period, children will receive such vaccines and boosters at recommended ages of vaccination at the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres. As for primary school children, vaccination is provided at schools by the DH's outreaching School Immunisation Teams.

The summary of the consensus recommendations has been uploaded to the webpages of the [SCVPD](#) and [SCAS](#). For more information, please visit the relevant webpages on the [HKCIP](#) and [cervical cancer](#).