



Girls and young women can now be protected from the most common causes of cervical cancer.

The cervical cancer vaccine is available free to young women born in 1990 and 1991, and from early 2009 for girls and young women aged 12 to 18.

Who should have the cervical cancer vaccine?

- The vaccine is available FREE to girls and young women aged 12 to 18.
- From 1 September 2008, young women born in 1990 or 1991 can get the vaccine from their doctor, practice nurse or health clinic.

- From 2009, most other girls and young women aged 12 to 18 will get the vaccine at school.

What is cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus or womb and is at the top of the vagina.
- Cervical cancer develops when abnormal cells grow on the cervix.

What causes cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common virus that is spread through sexual contact. Four out of five people become infected at some time during their lifetime.
- Most HPV infections clear by themselves, but some types can cause cell changes on the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer many years later.

How can the vaccine protect against cancer?

The vaccine works by causing the body's immune system to produce its own protection (antibodies) against the HPV types that cause most cervical cancers.

Why vaccinate?

- More than 99 per cent of cervical cancer is linked to infection with HPV.
- Every year in New Zealand about 160 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 60 die from it.
- Vaccinating girls and young women now against the main viruses that may cause cervical cancer will reduce their chances of getting cervical cancer later in life.
- In the long term more than 30 lives may be saved every year.

Why is the vaccine given to girls from 12 years old?

- The cervical cancer vaccine is only able to prevent HPV infection; it does not treat the infection.
- For best protection girls need to be vaccinated before they are likely to be exposed to HPV, which means before they start having any sexual contact.
- Although having a sexual partner may well be a long way off, having your daughter vaccinated now will mean she has far less risk of developing cervical cancer in the future.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine, which is called GARDASIL®, is given as a series of three injections in the upper arm over a six-month period.

How effective is the vaccine?

- This vaccine protects against the types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer (types 16 and 18) and genital warts (types 6 and 11).
- It is highly effective in preventing those types of HPV and related diseases in young women.
- The vaccine can only prevent the specific types of HPV before a person is exposed to them.
- Girls who are sexually active may still benefit from the vaccine because it is unlikely they will have been infected with both HPV types that cause 7 out of 10 cervical cancers.

How long does vaccine protection last?

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