

HPV Vaccination Drive: India's Big Push Against Cervical Cancer

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HPV Vaccination Drive Latest News

- The Union government is preparing to launch a nationwide **single-dose HPV vaccination drive** targeting **14-year-old girls** to curb cervical cancer in India.
- Cervical cancer is the **second most** common cancer among Indian women, and nearly 90% of cases are caused by persistent **human papillomavirus (HPV) infection**.
- Since HPV-related cancers are vaccine-preventable, widespread immunisation can significantly reduce disease burden.
- Beyond cervical cancer, HPV vaccination can also lower the incidence of anal, penile, vaginal, vulvar, and throat cancers. The campaign is therefore a major public health step toward reducing cancer-related morbidity and mortality in India

HPV Vaccination Drive: Eligibility and Rollout Plan

- The HPV vaccine targets a common sexually transmitted infection, with certain strains responsible for cervical and other cancers.
- Vaccination during early adolescence — before sexual activity begins — provides stronger and longer-lasting immunity.
- The upcoming 90-day nationwide campaign will offer a single-dose HPV vaccine to all 14-year-old girls across India.
- Eligible beneficiaries must book appointments at government health centres through the **U-Win digital platform**, similar to the Co-Win system used during the Covid-19 vaccination drive.
- After the initial campaign phase, HPV vaccination will continue under the routine immunisation programme at health and wellness centres.
- Each year, around 1.15 crore girls turning 14 will be eligible to receive the vaccine.

HPV Vaccination Drive: Vaccine Choice and Supply

- **Types of HPV and Cancer Risk** – There are at least 14 cancer-causing HPV strains, with types 16 and 18 responsible for nearly 70% of cervical cancer cases worldwide. HPV vaccines prevent infection from the most common high-risk strains.
- **Vaccine Being Used: Gardasil** – For the current nationwide campaign, the government will use Gardasil, manufactured by MSD Pharmaceuticals. The vaccine has established global efficacy and safety data.

Why Not the Indigenous Vaccine Yet

- India's locally developed vaccine, Cervavac by the Serum Institute of India, is not being used at present because:
 - It is awaiting WHO approval.
 - The ICMR is still evaluating its effectiveness as a single-dose vaccine.
- Officials indicate that a shift to Cervavac may occur in about two years, once regulatory approvals are completed.

Role of GAVI and Supply Plan

- The **GAVI** Vaccine Alliance will supply 2.6 crore doses to India for the campaign, sufficient for two years.
- One crore doses have already arrived.
- The remaining doses will be delivered over this year and the next.

Is a Single Dose of the HPV Vaccine Sufficient

- Yes. In 2022, the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization recommended a single-dose HPV vaccine for girls and women up to 20 years of age, citing strong and lasting protection.
- The group found "strikingly high efficacy" among children aged 9-14 years.
- Women above 21 are advised to take two doses six months apart, while immunocompromised individuals, including those with HIV, should ideally receive three doses — or at least two if three are not feasible.

Why the HPV Vaccination Campaign Matters

- **India's High Cervical Cancer Burden** – India accounts for nearly **20%** of global cervical cancer cases. Cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among Indian women, affecting about 1.25 lakh women and causing 75,000 deaths annually.
- **Proven Effectiveness of the HPV Vaccine** – Research initially showed that the HPV vaccine prevents infection and pre-cancerous lesions. Subsequent studies confirmed that it significantly lowers cervical cancer incidence.
- **Indirect Protection (Herd Immunity)** – Vaccinating girls also reduces transmission of HPV to boys, protecting them against other HPV-related cancers and strengthening community-level immunity.

Global Evidence: The Australia Example

- Australia introduced HPV vaccination in 2007 (and extended it to boys in 2013). Within a decade:
 - HPV prevalence among young women dropped from 22.7% to 1.5%.
 - Among older unvaccinated women, it fell from 11.8% to 1.1%.
- This demonstrates strong direct and indirect protection effects.

Long-Term Public Health Gains

- Although cervical cancer rates in India are gradually declining, widespread HPV vaccination could dramatically reduce mortality and ease pressure on healthcare systems, allowing better focus on other cancers.
- Since the first HPV vaccine approval in 2006, nearly 158 countries have introduced national immunisation programmes, underscoring its global public health importance.

Is This India's First HPV Immunisation Programme

- The upcoming nationwide campaign is **not** India's first HPV vaccination effort. Several states have previously introduced targeted immunisation programmes.

State-Level Initiatives

- **Sikkim (2018)** – Sikkim became the first state to launch a statewide HPV vaccination drive in 2018, achieving over 95% coverage for the recommended two doses.
- **Punjab (2016)** – Punjab initiated its programme in Mansa and Bhatinda districts, later expanding to other high-burden areas. The initial phase recorded more than 97% coverage.
- **Delhi (2016)** – Delhi launched vaccination through the Delhi State Cancer Institute. However, the programme saw limited uptake as beneficiaries had to visit the hospital to receive the vaccine.

Source: **IE** | **FP**

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