

HPV UNIVERSAL PROGRAMME GIRLS AND BOYS – Introduction of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine for boys

Background

- HPV is responsible for over 99% of cervical cancers. There is also increasing evidence of the association between HPV infection and head and neck cancers and cancers of the genital and anal areas. On the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), a HPV vaccination programme for girls aged 12-13 was introduced in 2008 to protect against cervical cancer.
- In July 2018 the JCVI advised that the HPV vaccination programme should be extended to adolescent boys. On 24 July 2018, the Government announced that HPV vaccination would be extended to boys aged 12-13. They will remain eligible until they are 18.
- The high uptake of HPV vaccine among girls over the last ten years has reduced the occurrence of several strains of HPV that the vaccine protects against. This means that the risk of unvaccinated boys and girls coming into contact with HPV viruses, and passing them on, is far lower than before the programme started in 2008. The number of diagnoses of genital warts in England has also fallen sharply in both girls and boys since the vaccination programme started, suggesting that boys are already benefiting indirectly from the girls' programme through 'herd immunity' protection. Offering the vaccine to boys will provide further protection for all.

Questions and Answers

Who will get the vaccine?

- It will be offered to boys aged 12-13 from 2019 and these boys will then remain eligible until they are 18 (the same as the girls' programme).

Will older boys (i.e. those currently aged 13-18) be offered the vaccine on a "catch-up" basis?

- Older boys will not be offered the vaccine.
- The high uptake of HPV vaccine among girls over the last ten years has reduced the occurrence of several strains of HPV that the vaccine protects against. This means that the risk of unvaccinated boys and girls coming into contact with HPV viruses, and passing them on, is far lower than before the programme started in 2008. The number of diagnoses of genital warts in England has also fallen sharply in both girls and boys since the vaccination programme started, suggesting that boys are already benefiting indirectly from the girls' programme through 'herd immunity' protection. Offering the vaccine to boys will provide further protection for all.

- This means that there is not a strong case for a catch-up programme for older boys as there was for the girls programme in 2008 and there would be limited additional benefit.
- However, the criteria for all our vaccination programme aims to target those most at risk or with the greatest ability to benefit. The priority is therefore to vaccinate adolescents before they reach sexual maturity.

But wouldn't it be even better to introduce an HPV catch-up campaign for boys aged 13-18 in a "belt and braces" approach?

- Extending the HPV vaccination programme to boys aged 12-13 will prevent more HPV-related cancers and reduce the overall burden of these cancers sooner than a girls-only programme would do.
- It is estimated that any additional benefits of extending the HPV programme would be very small given the protection older boys already have from the current programme.
- We need to ensure that the HPV vaccination programme can be extended to boys aged 12-13 with high uptake as quickly as possible and also that during the roll-out we maintain high vaccination uptake in girls as well.