

Lao PDR launches nationwide HPV immunization campaign to protect girls against cervical cancer



In a significant move to enhance girls' health, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) Ministry of Health, in partnership with UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, with support from the Government of Australia, has launched the 2024 human papillomavirus (HPV) immunization campaign.

This nationwide initiative aims to protect over 124,000 girls aged 10–14 from cervical cancer, one of the country's most prevalent and deadly diseases among women aged 35–49 years.

Schools across the country will serve as vaccination sites, ensuring that both enrolled students and out-of-school girls receive this life-saving vaccine.

"This campaign represents another important milestone for Lao PDR in our ongoing efforts to safeguard the health of women and girls," said **Dr. Phonephaseuth Sayyamoungkhoun, Director General of the Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion at the Ministry of Health**. "By providing the HPV vaccine to young girls each year, we are continuing decisive action on cervical cancer. I urge all community members and leaders to ensure that every eligible girl receives this vaccine."

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Cervical cancer remains a significant health challenge in Lao PDR, with approximately 320 women diagnosed each year and more than half of them dying from the disease. The HPV vaccine is proven to be safe and effective, building immunity against the types of HPV responsible for over 70% of cervical cancer cases.

"By prioritizing HPV vaccination both in and out of school, the Lao PDR Government is taking a crucial step towards preventing cervical cancer and protecting the health and well-being of the nation's young women," said **Nadia Lasri, Senior Country Manager and Coordinator of Gavi support in Lao PDR**. "Gavi is committed to working with Lao PDR and other countries that are

investing in expanding access to this highly impactful vaccine, which is so effective at reducing cervical cancer cases and saving lives."

The campaign, funded by Gavi and the Government of Lao PDR with support from the Government of Australia, reflects a strong partnership between international organizations and local authorities.

"It is gratifying to see how Lao parents, girls, and young women have embraced HPV vaccination in the past four years," said **Bilal Durrani, UNICEF Country Representative in Lao PDR**. "This campaign is an outstanding example of excellent collaboration between the Ministries of Health and Education and development partners to promote the well-being of the next generation." Globally, over 350 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been administered safely.

"This vaccine is safe and effective. Globally we've seen its transformative impact on reducing cervical cancer and saving lives," said **Dr. Tim Armstrong, WHO Representative to Lao PDR**. "HPV vaccines are a game changer." -www.gavi.org, November 19, 2024

Notes to editors

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common sexually transmitted infection. An HPV infection usually goes away on its own without treatment; however, some HPV infections can develop into cancer. Cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer caused by HPV and is one of the leading causes of cancer deaths among women in Lao PDR aged 35–49 years.