

Girls aged 9 to 14 to get cervical cancer vaccines through schools

The preventable and curable cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in Indian women



Students and teachers participate in a cervical cancer awareness drive in Visakhapatnam.
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The Indian government will provide vaccines for the prevention of cervical cancer to girls aged between 9 and 14 years through their schools.

The decision was based on the National Technical Advisory Group for Immunisation (NTAGI) recommendation to introduce the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine in the Universal Immunisation Programme.

India is expected to roll out the indigenously developed CERVAVAC vaccine by mid-2023.

The vaccine has received the Drugs Controller General of India's approval and has been cleared by the government advisory panel NTAGI for use in the public health programme.

A one-time catch-up vaccine will be provided for 9 to 14 year-old adolescent girls. Subsequently, it will be introduced at 9 years.

The vaccination will be provided primarily through schools because of the high enrolment of girls. Those girls who are unable to attend school on the day that the vaccination campaign is organised will be provided the vaccine at a health facility.

Out-of-school girls will be reached through community outreach and mobile teams, according to a statement from the Education Ministry.

In a joint letter, the Union Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar and Union Health Secretary Mr. Rajesh Bhushan have requested the States and Union Territories to issue appropriate directions for organising HPV vaccination centres in schools and identifying a nodal person in each government and private school to coordinate vaccination activities and collate the number of 9-14 year old girls. They will also spread awareness to parents during parent-teacher meetings.

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In India, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women. India contributes the largest share of the global cervical cancer burden. According to a recent study published in The Lancet, India accounted for nearly one in every four deaths globally due to cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer is a preventable and curable disease, as long as it is detected early and managed effectively. Most cervical cancers are associated with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and the

HPV vaccine can prevent most cases of cervical cancer if the vaccine is given before girls or women are exposed to the virus. Prevention through vaccination is one of the pillars of the global strategy adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for the elimination of cervical cancer. - **www.thehindu.com, December 22, 2022**