

Nepal receives 460,940 doses of HPV vaccine

Over 1.68 million girls between 10 and 14 years will be immunised in a nationwide HPV vaccination campaign.



The vaccine doses are part of over 1.7 million doses required for the first phase of the campaign, health officials say. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED/THE KATHMANDU POST

Nepal received 460,940 doses of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine on Tuesday (December 17, 2024) evening, which will be used in the nationwide vaccination drive, scheduled to start on February 5, next year.

The vaccine doses are part of over 1.7 million doses required for the first phase of the campaign, health officials say.

“We received the first tranche of HPV vaccine doses,” said Om Prasad Upadhyay, an immunisation supervisor officer at the Department of Health Services. “Remaining doses will arrive before the start of the vaccination campaign.”

Human papillomavirus is a viral infection that spreads through skin contact and is a major cause of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second-most common cancer in the developing world and a major cause of death among Nepali women as well. It is estimated that hundreds of women get diagnosed with cervical cancer in Nepal every year.

According to the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur, more than 700 women suffering from cervical cancer seek treatment at the hospital every year.

Early treatment can prevent 80 percent of cervical cancer

Experts say early treatment can prevent up to 80 percent of cervical cancer cases.

Countries like Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives have introduced HPV vaccines nationally, while India and Indonesia have introduced them in some districts.

In 2016, Nepal piloted HPV vaccines in Chitwan and Kaski districts. During the pilot, all girls aged between 11 and 13 years were given two doses of the vaccine.

Last year, the country purchased 20,000 doses of the HPV vaccine and administered it to around 9,000 girls aged between 14 and 15 years in all seven provinces. Health authorities administered the vaccines at schools after other measures failed to increase the vaccine’s uptake.

Doctors say most cases of cervical cancer are linked to HPV, and widespread immunisation could significantly reduce the impact of cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers worldwide.

Nationwide HPV vaccination drive from February 2025

The Ministry of Health and Population is preparing to launch a nationwide HPV vaccination drive from February 5 next year.

During the nationwide campaign, over 1.68 million girls between 10 and 14 years will be administered the HPV vaccine. Two doses of vaccine will be administered within a 12-month period. The Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI) has committed to supply the vaccine doses required for the campaign free of cost along with the campaign's operation cost, officials say. The government has decided to include the HPV vaccine in the routine immunisation list following the completion of the nationwide drive.

It is estimated that there are around 350,000 girls aged 10 years who will be inoculated with the HPV vaccine.

Nepal has to cover a certain percentage of the cost of the vaccine once it is included in the regular immunisation list, officials say.

The World Health Organisation says HPV vaccination is recommended as part of a coordinated strategy to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases caused by the virus. – **asianews.network/The Kathmandu Post, December 20, 2024**