

Injecting the truth

Headliners reporters talk to GP Dr Tom Black about the controversial cervical cancer vaccination.

Clodagh: Do you support the cervical cancer injection? The cervical cancer injection is a very good idea. There are two types, Cervrix and Gardasil. Both of them do the job pretty much for the two strains of the virus types that cause cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is a disease that comes in young ladies and is due to an infection which is usually sexually transmitted. That doesn't mean that you have to go with a lot of fellas to get it. You could literally go with one fella, get married to him and still get cervical cancer. So it's a very good idea to take the vaccine because that prevents most cases, probably more than three quarters of the cases of cervical cancer. The thing we always say is that you still have to get smears done to protect yourself 100%.



Clodagh: If I said to you that this is just a moneymaking scam what would you say? You would be completely wrong and I'd say you need to go and read the evidence because although it is an expensive vaccine, the two companies involved have spent an awful lot of money researching it and developing it. Drugs cost money and if they save lives that's a good thing. It's an awful thing when it happens to see a young lady in her 20s die from cervical cancer. Awful.

Fiona: What are the symptoms of cervical cancer in young people? Cervical cancer usually presents itself with a bleeding between periods so doctors would usually want to examine you and make sure that there weren't any changes with the cervix and then we would do a smear to look for the early changes that would come before cervical cancer. I think that young ladies should get the vaccine. I have two 16 year old daughters and if I can persuade them they will get the vaccine.

Fiona: There are people that would say they don't know enough about the injection. What would you say to that? We try very hard to pass out information, it is an important message. I think it will take time to get through. We are certainly not getting everyone to take the vaccine at the moment but I think with time the message will get through.

Grace: I am 14 and I missed out on getting the injection. As I understand I will not be offered it till I am 16 or 17. Should I be worried? What advice would you give me? I wouldn't be worried because most 14 year olds are not sexually active so therefore assuming you will get your vaccination in the next year or two you will be covered fairly well for it. So I would say your general practice will call you for it and if they don't just go in with your mum and have a chat and I'm sure you will get it.

Grace: So it's not true that you don't have to be sexually active to get the disease? You can get cancer in any cell in the body without necessarily getting an infection or smoking or drinking too much or whatever. In other words you can be unlucky. We have had ladies in their early 20s get cervical cancer and that's a tragedy because that is very young, our screening programme doesn't usually start till the early 20s. We have had the recent case of Jade Goody who died from it recently. I think she was very brave and did a lot of good by publicising it and encouraging young ladies to get the vaccine and get the smears done.

Markus: We've read stories of boys in America being offered the injection. What's your reaction to that? Yes, there is a strange logic to that; boys are encouraged to get the vaccine so that they don't give it to their girlfriends or wives in the future.

Grace: Dr Black what is the key message to young people on this issue? We still have a lot of cases of cervical cancer and what we call the early stages that involves a lot of treatment in hospital so the key message is please get the vaccine because it will prevent most cases and still get the smears done every three to five years to prevent any cases that may creep through.

About this story

This story was originally an interview for radio and was conducted by; Markus Pliejzier (15), Fiona Hall (17), Clodagh Devine (17) and Grace McGowan (15)

1 comment

cervical cancer HPV

You comment in your story that boys are being offered the vaccine. Not really. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a approved one of the vaccines for boys to stop genital warts. In MY opinion, boys should get the vaccine because then we would have "herd immunity" and do a better job of stopping the HPV virus.

I think, many years from now we will see some other HPV-Associated Cancers go down too as a result of the vaccine. I think the vaccines will reduce not only cervical cancer, but also anal, penile, vulvar, vaginal and about 25% of head and neck cancers. The HPV-Cervical Cancer Vaccine is positioned to reduce a variety of cancers in my opinion. AND of course, if we could get this vaccine into underdeveloped countries, we can reduce upward of 200,000 deaths worldwide each year! Imagine that!

One more thing...It sure would be nice if in the UK you can reduce the age a young women first starts getting their Pap test. Here in the Uited States it had been age 18 to 21 or withing three years of a first sexual activity. THis has chnaged from time to time. It looks now like the United States will be starting cervical cancer screening at age 21. I think you need to reduce your healthcare systems first Pap test from 25 to 21!!

And soon enough we will have HPV Testing as the first defense.

Alan Kaye
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International HPV Cancer Coalition
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Alan Kaye
Alan Kaye from Hollywood, California, United States, 22 January 2010 08:02

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