

Suspensions over HPV vaccine

What is the issue?

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- Globally there are reliability debates over the efficiency of HPV vaccine.
- India has planned introduced the vaccine in its universal immunisation program, despite small risks of the vaccine.

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What is HPV?

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- Human papillomaviruses (HPVs) which can be easily spread through direct sexual contact, from the skin and mucous membranes of infected people to the skin and mucous membranes of their partners.
- HPV infection is so common, most people get HPV infections shortly after becoming sexually active for the first time.
- Low-risk HPVs can cause skin warts on or around the genitals and anus and recurrent respiratory problems.
- High-risk HPVs, which can cause cancer Cervical cancer, Anal cancer, Oropharyngeal cancers (cancers of the middle part of the throat)
- Most high-risk HPV infections occur without any symptoms, go away within 1 to 2 years, and do not cause cancer.
- Persistent infections with high-risk HPV types can lead to cell changes that, if untreated, may progress to cancer.
- HPV vaccination can reduce the risk of infection by the HPV types targeted by the vaccine.

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What are the issues with the HPV vaccine?

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- There are suspicions over the HPV vaccine that they may be causing a trio of rare illnesses such as

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1. Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) - It is an abnormal increase in heart rate when a patient stands up.
2. Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) - It is unexplained, severe pain in a limb.
3. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) - It is debilitating tiredness that leaves patients unable to function normally.

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- All three are poorly understood conditions and often go undiagnosed.
- POTS and CFS sufferers may have other symptoms like nausea, sleep disturbances, and chronic pain.
- It is important to note that these are only suspicions, there is no evidence that these illnesses are caused by the vaccine.
- On the other hand, even if POTS and CRPS are shown to be caused by the vaccine, the incidence in vaccine recipients is likely to be very low.

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What is the stand of India over the vaccine?

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- India has the largest burden of cervical cancer in the world and about 70,000 women die of it each year.
- Around 70% of these cases are caused by infections from HPV strains, which

the vaccines prevent.

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- So India is introducing HPV vaccines in its Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), by which millions of girls in India aged between 9 and 14 years will get the vaccines for free.

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- Given the rarity of these side effects and high burden of disease, India has taken the decision to go ahead with the vaccine.

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- India senses that there is a small risk of the vaccine being linked to the syndromes, but the benefits outweigh the risks.

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Source: The Hindu

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