

Educate, vaccinate, prevent: strategies to tackle cervical cancer in Pakistan - an editorial letter

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69491/zz736p43>



To,

The Editor

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in humans and around 95% of the cases are caused by Human papilloma virus (HPV). Usually asymptomatic, almost all sexually active people will get infected by HPV at least once in their lifetime (1). Early detection of HPV infection and immunization has led to lower incidence of cervical cancer in developed countries but low availability, lack of vaccination programs, and stigma surrounding HPV is still a challenge associated with HPV causing cervical cancer in countries like Pakistan.

Approximately 73.8 million girls of age 15 years and older are at risk of developing cervical cancer and around 5008 women are diagnosed every year, yet no official HPV vaccination program or recommendation exists in the country. Currently, two HPV vaccines are available for protection against cervical cancer, but a lack of awareness and the cost of these vaccines has cause limited access to the population (2).

A multifaceted approach to solve the hindrance of HPV vaccination must be taken, including comprehensive education campaigns and awareness sessions in schools targeting safety and efficacy of HPV vaccines. There should also be advanced curriculum including information about HPV and the HPV vaccination in health education classes. Healthcare professionals must be invited to schools on World Immunization Week annually to share their thoughts and organize workshops on the importance of HPV vaccination (3).

Community campaigns should be initiated nationwide targeting areas with less awareness about the HPV vaccination through promoting supportive environments in schools and workplace where discussions can be made regarding sexual health and vaccinations without any stigma associated with the topic and school newsletters, websites, posters and social media platforms can be used to share educational posts and videos regarding HPV vaccination (4).

With regular vaccination and screening tests, a trend can be described in the country and specific implementations can be made geographically to combat the increased infection rate with HPV. A similar program like Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States can be formed for Pakistan, which will regulate these findings and approaches to minimize the risk of HPV infections by regular screening and vaccinations (5).

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