

Lower HPV vaccination rates putting girls from ethnic minorities at risk of cancer

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Girls from some ethnic minorities are less likely to be vaccinated against Human Papillomavirus (HPV), responsible for almost all cases of cervical cancer, according to new research presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) annual Cancer Conference in Liverpool.

The research, funded by Cancer Research UK, also found that unvaccinated girls said they would be less likely to attend screening for [cervical cancer](#) when invited as adults.

Researchers from the Cancer Research UK Health Behaviour Research Centre at UCL asked nearly 2,000 girls from 13 schools across London about whether they had been vaccinated against HPV, if they were sexually active, whether they smoked and if they planned to attend [cervical screening](#) in the future.

The study found that girls from 'Black' or 'Other' ethnic minority backgrounds¹ were less likely to have been vaccinated than 'White' or 'Asian' girls.

Dr Jo Waller, study author based at UCL, said: "Cervical cancer is largely preventable through vaccination against HPV – the virus that causes it – and cervical screening, which picks up problems early so they can be treated before cancer develops. Our study suggests that girls who don't have the vaccine may be less likely to go for screening in the future, which leaves them at greater risk of developing cervical cancer."

"We also found that some ethnic groups were less likely to be vaccinated than others, suggesting that we need to understand the reasons for ethnic inequalities in uptake, as well as working to ensure that unvaccinated women understand the importance of cervical screening."

The HPV vaccine was introduced in the UK in 2008, with a national vaccination programme for girls in year eight (aged 12-13). To get the full protection, girls need to receive three doses of the vaccine within six months.

Almost five million women each year in England are invited for cervical screening, which looks for precancerous changes in the cells lining the cervix. These tests are routinely offered to women in England between the ages of 25 and 64.

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of early diagnosis, said: "This study reveals there are groups of girls who are not getting vaccinated and, as a result, are at an increased risk of cervical cancer. This needs to change to ensure as many girls as possible are protected.

"It's vital that [girls](#), along with their parents, understand the importance of both these programmes, which are designed to prevent cancer from developing. As well as cervical cancer, research has shown that HPV also increases the risk of developing other cancers, such as some types of mouth, head and neck cancers, anal cancer and other genital cancers."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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