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The HPV vaccine will protect **YOUR DAUGHTER AGAINST CERVICAL CANCER**

Your daughter will be offered a vaccine preventing infection with the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV causes cervical cancer. The vaccine is part of the national vaccination programme and is free of charge for all 11 to 12-year-old girls in the 6th grade. The vaccine will be administered as part of school healthcare.

WHY DOES YOUR DAUGHTER NEED THE HPV VACCINE?

HPV infections are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). Such infections are very common – approximately eight in ten people are infected at some point in their lives. In most cases, there are no symptoms and the infection is short-lived. However, a longer-term infection develops in one in ten cases and could lead to the growth of pre-cancerous cells. Some of these cases will develop into cancer. Each year, around 150 women develop cervical cancer. Of these women, 50 die.

The vaccine protects against the HPV infections with the highest cancer risk. Preventing such infections prevents the development of cancer. The vaccine prevents approximately four out of five cases of cervical cancer and a large proportion of pre-cancerous conditions requiring treatment. However, the vaccine must be administered at a sufficiently young age, before girls have been infected with the virus.

The human papilloma virus is usually transmitted through sexual intercourse. Use of condoms does not provide full protection against infection, because in addition to mucous membrane contact the virus also spreads through skin-to-skin contact.

THE SAFETY OF THE VACCINE IS WELL ESTABLISHED

The HPV vaccine has been part of national vaccination programmes for girls throughout Western Europe and in the United States. Since 2007, tens of millions of doses of the vaccine have been administered. So far, approximately 70% to 80% of girls have been vaccinated as part of the national vaccination programme in Finland. The appearance of possible side-effects has been closely monitored.

Many recipients of the vaccine have experienced short-lived symptoms including pain at the site of the injection, redness and swelling. Some have also experienced fatigue, a headache, fever and nausea. More serious side effects, such as severe allergic reactions, have been extremely rare.



CERVICAL SCREENING DOES NOT PREVENT THE GROWTH OF PRE-CANCEROUS CELLS OR ALL CANCERS

A cervical screening test (also called a smear test, or pap smear) is a method of detecting pre-cancerous cells in the cervix. Mild changes are monitored but lesions confirmed as pre-cancerous are surgically removed, if possible. Treating pre-cancerous lesions can damage the cervix and increase the risk of premature birth in future pregnancies.

Cervical screenings have reduced the number of cancers and deaths. However, they do not reduce the number of HPV infections or pre-cancerous conditions. Despite the extensive cervical screenings over the last few years, the number of cases of cervical cancer in women under 40 has increased.

THE VACCINE IS ALSO BENEFICIAL IN THE PREVENTION OF OTHER CANCERS

Scientific evidence suggests that HPV vaccines prevent HPV-related cancers in the genital area and can reduce the number of cancers of the mouth and neck. Because HPV vaccines reduce the prevalence of the virus in the general population, vaccinating girls assists with cancer prevention in boys.

Dear parent, please discuss the HPV vaccine with your daughter. Talk to her and learn more about the issue! The message you pass on, as a parent, matters! For more information on the HPV vaccine, please contact your daughter's school nurse or visit: www.tyttöjenjuttu.fi (in Finnish and Swedish, only).



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