

# Protecting Our Mob with the cervical cancer vaccine

## What is human papilloma virus (HPV)?

HPV is a group of viruses. This virus can cause genital warts and sometimes cancer. You can get HPV by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. HPV is so common that four out of five people will have it at some time in their life and never know it.

HPV usually goes away by itself, but sometimes the virus can change the cells of the cervix from healthy to unhealthy. This is why we have women's checkups (Pap tests) so that we can pick up unhealthy cells well before cancer develops.

**It's important to remember that most women who have HPV do not develop cervical cancer.**

## Preventing cervical cancer

A Pap test every two years is important to check if the cervix is healthy.

But there is now another way we can help girls from developing cervical cancer. A vaccine has been developed that can protect girls from the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers.

Aboriginal women are up to four times more likely to die from cervical cancer than other women in Australia. This is why the vaccine and women's checkups (Pap tests) are so important.

It is important that all women aged between 18 and 69 who ever had sex have regular Pap tests every two years, whether they have had the vaccine or not.

## The cervical cancer vaccine

The vaccine works best if given to girls before they are sexually active.

Until June 2009, the **free vaccine** is available for girls and women aged 12 to 26. After this time, it will be offered to all girls in their first year of high school.

For girls to be protected they need to have three doses (needles) over a six-month period. The needle is given in the upper arm. It's very important for girls to have all three doses as this provides the best protection.

Having the vaccine does not mean that girls won't need to have Pap tests in the future.

## Things you should know

Girls who are pregnant should not have the vaccine.

Girls may have a sore arm after they have the vaccine but this will quickly go away.

After having the vaccine, if girls feel unwell or have a reaction, tell a health worker, doctor, nurse or family member.

Having the vaccine is voluntary. Girls who receive the vaccine at school need to have parent's permission first. A consent form will be sent home for parents to sign.

## How to get the vaccine

During 2007 and 2008, girls aged between 12 and 18 will be offered the free vaccine at school. After this time, it will be offered to all girls in their first year of high school.

Until June 2009, young women aged between 18 and 26 can receive the vaccine free at their Aboriginal Health Service or from their GP. Girls aged between 12 and 18 who missed out on receiving the vaccine at school can also receive the free vaccine from their Aboriginal Health Service, GP or local council.

## Who can I talk to?

If you want more information you can talk to:

- Your doctor
- Aboriginal health worker
- Women's health nurse

**For more information about the vaccine, call 1300 882 008 or visit [www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation)**

Fact sheet developed by The Cancer Council Victoria

The Cancer Council and DHS would like to thank the Aboriginal health workers who provided their feedback and comments in producing this resource.

Artwork by Paola Morabito.

# Protecting Our Mob with the cervical cancer vaccine

**Artwork by Paola Morabito  
Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmara**

The artwork *Protecting Our Mob* tells the story of the cervical cancer vaccine for girls aged 12-26.

Even though the vaccine is for young girls and young women, *Protecting Our Mob* is everyone's business. Young girls and young women are a very important part of our communities and therefore they and their health and well being should be protected in every way possible.

The three central figures represent Indigenous females aged between 12 and 26 and they are surrounded by the vaccine protecting them and the Victorian Aboriginal communities, behind the girls flows the vaccine, golden in colour representing the medicine that can protect them from the virus that can lead to cervical cancer.

The edges of the artwork have blue designs representing the Aboriginal lands that the communities live on, and the heritage that belongs to the girls, reminding us that we have a long and proud continuing history in Victoria of Aboriginal identity and culture with a determination to achieve good health and wellbeing.

Standing behind the three females are three Message Sticks, engraved with designs that tell the message of the vaccine, of how important it is to be carried through Victoria to each Aboriginal community.

The three message sticks represent the three required doses of the vaccine.

The red circles symbolise the many Victorian Aboriginal communities and the yellow lines surrounding them show how they are connected to each other.

A circle of vaccine flows around the girls, messages sticks and communities, showing it protecting the young girls and women from the virus that can lead to cervical cancer.

