



Shaping a Strategy to Introduce HPV Vaccines in Vietnam

Formative Research Results from the *HPV Vaccines: Evidence for Impact* project

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide and the most common cancer among women in the developing world.¹ Incidence and mortality rates of cervical cancer remain disproportionately higher in poor countries due to a lack of effective prevention strategies in those settings. New vaccines to prevent human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes cervical cancer, therefore represent a potentially life-saving intervention for millions of women.

Project overview

Effort is required to prepare health systems and communities to accept and embrace any new health technology. Through our *HPV Vaccines: Evidence for Impact* project, PATH, in close collaboration with ministries of health and other partners, are piloting vaccine introduction in four countries: India, Peru, Uganda, and Vietnam. Together, we are generating evidence to help policymakers and planners in the developing world make informed decisions regarding vaccine introduction and financing. When combined with a comprehensive approach that includes screening and precancer treatment, evidence-based HPV vaccination programs could reduce developing-country cervical cancer deaths to the currently low levels observed in many industrialized countries.^{2,3}

This overview summarizes results from formative research in Vietnam regarding the health systems and policy context that will affect HPV vaccine introduction, as well as beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors related to HPV, cervical cancer, and vaccination. The formative research was designed to guide development of a vaccine delivery strategy, a communications strategy (for outreach to communities), and an advocacy strategy (for outreach to policymakers). As a next step, these strategies are being implemented and evaluated through a demonstration project in each country. The findings from the demonstration projects—anticipated in 2010 and 2011—can then serve as an evidence base for governments deciding when and how to incorporate HPV vaccination into a comprehensive cervical cancer prevention program.



School girls in Hoa Binh, Vietnam.

“Overall, I think that people will support a cervical cancer vaccine...[and] their support may be affected by many factors, including its cost and what information they receive about it.”

—Health education official, Hanoi

For more information

For more information about PATH’s cervical cancer vaccine project, please visit www.path.org/cervicalcancer or www.rho.org.

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Formative research results

In Vietnam, PATH and our partners conducted formative research to explore possible approaches to vaccine introduction in that setting—and we found overall support for the vaccine, as well as possible obstacles to effective HPV vaccine delivery. The strategies tested in Vietnam’s demonstration project will include the following elements, developed from the results of the formative research.

Vietnam’s HPV vaccine delivery strategy: key elements

- Explore two possible strategies for introduction and delivery of the HPV vaccine: through schools and through commune health centers.
- Integrate HPV vaccine into the work of the national immunization program in order to capitalize on the human resources, infrastructure, and public awareness already in place.
- Train health workers on cervical cancer, the vaccine’s benefits, and communication with the target population, and update their general immunization skills and knowledge.
- Coordinate among the relevant agencies across sectors and levels of government, including by harmonizing activity-specific plans at the commune level with annual plans at higher levels.
- Fortify the cold chain to accommodate a new vaccine, including by accounting for the cost of electricity at the commune level and other expenses related to maintenance.
- Support health workers, particularly at the commune level, to effectively monitor vaccination, report any adverse events following immunization, and safely dispose of used needles.

Vietnam’s HPV vaccine communications strategy: key elements

- Publicize endorsements of HPV vaccination by the Vietnam Ministry of Health, the national immunization program, People’s Committees, Women’s Unions, and other prominent groups and individuals.
- Disseminate clear and accurate information on the HPV vaccine, including effectiveness in cervical cancer prevention, safety, and side effects.
- Clearly communicate that the HPV vaccine has already been extensively tested in international clinical trials, is licensed in Vietnam, and is

currently being provided to girls in many developed countries.

- Tailor messages and materials for different audiences; for example, make materials for girls and parents more accessible, and those for teachers and health workers more scientific.
- Use a variety of communication strategies to reach decision-makers, including outreach through Women’s Unions, People’s Committees, health workers, and teachers.

Vietnam’s HPV vaccine advocacy strategy: key elements

- Partner with the national immunization program and the Ministry of Health to generate momentum and leadership from other key ministries and diverse stakeholders at the national level, including the Ministry of Finance.
- Consider engaging global agencies, including the World Health Organization and the GAVI Alliance, and regional and local implementers in the policy development process.
- Make information available to policymakers on cervical cancer disease burden in Vietnam, effectiveness of the HPV vaccine, and potential financing sources, as well as safety, side effects, and cost-effectiveness (when available).
- Convene workshops with policymakers to promote awareness and interest regarding the HPV vaccine.
- Explain how HPV vaccination is consistent with Vietnam’s health priorities to prevent cancer and to promote immunization.

References

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3. Parkin DM, Bray F. Chapter 2: The burden of HPV-related cancers. *Vaccine*. 2006;24(Suppl. 3):S11–S25.

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