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Cervical Cancer Action News Brief | November 2011 *News and views of interest to our community*

GAVI Alliance to Expand HPV Vaccination in the World's Poorest Countries

Cervical Cancer Action celebrates GAVI support as a tipping point for prevention, while challenging partners also to increase HPV vaccination in middle-income countries and cervical screening and treatment worldwide.

Today is a day for celebration. The announcement by the GAVI Alliance Board to support HPV vaccines in the world's poorest countries brings this life-saving intervention closer to the women who need it most.

The [GAVI Alliance](#) is a public-private partnership including UNICEF, World Health Organization, the World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, developing country governments, and others. GAVI focuses on helping the poorest countries in the world introduce vaccines that are already saving lives in wealthier countries, such as hepatitis B, rotavirus, and pneumococcal vaccines. Now HPV vaccine is included on the list! The full [press release](#) is available on the GAVI website.

Leaders in developing countries have long been seeking access to HPV vaccine. Since 2007, Cervical Cancer Action has received nearly [400 letters](#) from Presidents, First Ladies, Ministers of Health, Ministers of Women's Affairs, Parliamentarians, physicians and grassroots leaders calling for international support for improved cervical cancer prevention. Equitable access to prevention was the subject of a global petition signed by thousands. It also has become a rallying point for [African First Ladies](#) struggling to find solutions to early disease and death plaguing women and families in their countries.

The price of HPV vaccine has been a major barrier to routine use worldwide. Eligible countries will be able to apply for GAVI support. Countries whose applications are successful will have to provide some co-financing for the vaccine, but for the poorest countries, this is just US\$0.20 per dose. If GAVI negotiations to secure a sustainable price from manufacturers are successful and countries can demonstrate their ability to deliver the vaccines, up to two million women and girls in nine countries could be protected from cervical cancer by 2015.

Introduced in 2006, HPV vaccination is now offered through government programs in 33 countries. The first countries to introduce the vaccine were wealthy, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In these countries, strong early screening and treatment programs already result in low levels of disease, but this highly effective vaccine was still considered an important public health investment. Several middle-income countries, including Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Malaysia, and some low-income countries, including Bhutan and Rwanda, also have started ambitious national programs.

Expanding access to HPV vaccine is a crucial element of overall prevention planning, and the GAVI offer is a boon. That said, GAVI support will not solve the problem alone: middle-income countries are not eligible to apply to GAVI, yet they also face challenges paying for vaccine on the open market. Fortunately for the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization EPI Revolving Fund has negotiated low prices for bulk procurement for member countries. Still, more assistance is needed.

Countries also need help instituting, or expanding, programs for screening adult women for cervical abnormalities, especially programs based on effective and affordable screening approaches such as visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) followed by cryotherapy treatment as indicated. Buying equipment for cryotherapy represents a good investment, but with significant upfront costs. Global partners need to come together to make the necessary investments and prevent the current 275,000 cervical cancer deaths worldwide each year.

While GAVI focuses on immunization, the application process emphasizes the importance of thinking comprehensively about cervical cancer prevention and control, and demonstrating some of that thinking in the application itself.

Countries interested in completing GAVI applications for HPV vaccine can get assistance from CCA members for designing effective, and cost-effective, vaccination strategies based on experience in the developing world, along with feasible strategies for screening and treating adult women already at risk of cervical cancer. Please contact info@cervicalcanceraction.org for more information.

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