

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) VACCINATION

VAC'S POSITION

VAC believes that the National Immunisation Program should provide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations to:

- Gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) who are under 26 years of age; and
- All people who are living with HIV, including people newly diagnosed with HIV.

BACKGROUND

HPV is one of the most common STIs in Australia¹, and there are several strains of HPV. While many strains are relatively harmless, some can cause genital warts and a range of cancers.

HPV can be easily prevented by using a vaccination. Australia has implemented a National HPV Vaccination Program for males and females aged 12-13 years of age. This program has been credited with dramatically reducing the incidence of HPV in Australia.²

Gay men and PLHIV are not eligible for HPV vaccinations under the National HPV Vaccination Program.

Researchers³ estimate that the prevalence of anal HPV among heterosexual men is 15%. The prevalence of anal HPV among gay men is 60%. This figure increases to 77% for gay men with HIV. For PLHIV, HPV can further complicate the experience of living with HIV.⁴

Further research suggests that gay men in Australia bear a considerable burden of HPV related disease with rates of HPV related anal cancer among gay men similar to the rates of cervical cancer in unscreened women.⁵

In light of this data, there are strong equity grounds to include gay men in the provision of free HPV vaccinations in Victoria - and Australia. The failure to do so amounts to a dereliction of Australia's duty to provide people with equal access to a reasonable standard of health care.

A study assessing the efficacy of the HPV vaccination in gay men aged between 16-26 years of age found that the risk of acquiring anal HPV was reduced by 75%, and the risk of acquiring genital warts was reduced by 90%. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that gay men under the age of 26 get an HPV vaccination.

VAC is of the view that gay men under 26 years of age, people living with HIV and people diagnosed with HIV in the future should have access to free HPV vaccinations.

¹ See <http://www.sti.health.gov.au/internet/sti/publishing.nsf/Content/HPV>

² See <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-hpv>

³ S Goldstone, et al, 'Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Human Papillomavirus Infection Among HIV-Seronegative Men Who Have Sex With Men' (2011) 203 Journal of Infectious Diseases 66-74. see <http://jid.oxfordjournals.org/content/203/1/66.full.pdf+html>

⁴ C Sadlier, et al, 'Prevalence of human papillomavirus in men who have sex with men in the era of an effective vaccine; a call to act' (2014) 15(8) HIV Medication

⁵ Grulich AE, et al 'Anal human papillomavirus infection and associated neoplastic lesions in men who have sex with men: a systematic review and meta-analysis' (2012) 13(5) Lancet Oncology pp. 487 - 500