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Around 20% of ethnic school girls not vaccinated against HPV

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Around 20 per cent of girls from ethnic minority backgrounds are not being vaccinated against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) because they feel they don't need to have it, according to a Cancer Research UK survey presented today at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool.

Reasons included: 'Because I am not sexually active and will not be until I get married' and: 'My Mum didn't think it was necessary for me to have the vaccine since I won't be sleeping around'.

This is the first study done with an ethnically diverse group of girls to look at why they are not vaccinated, or do not complete the series of injections.

Researchers found that 17 per cent of girls from black backgrounds and 22 per cent of girls from Asian backgrounds who hadn't been vaccinated said that they did not need the vaccination and the reasons they gave included that they did not expect to be sexually active before marriage.

Unvaccinated girls from black backgrounds were most likely - 20 per cent of those surveyed - to say their parents did not allow them to have the vaccination but without providing further explanation. The study authors think this could mean they had not had a conversation with their parents about the vaccine.

Concerns about side effects of the vaccination were most commonly reported by unvaccinated girls from white backgrounds - 27 per cent.

The questionnaire was given to girls aged 15-16 in ethnically diverse schools in London including girls from white, black, Asian and other ethnicities. Although the majority of the 2,163 girls included in the research had been fully vaccinated, 233 were unvaccinated and 122 under vaccinated - meaning they didn't have every dose of the vaccine.

The vaccination protects against infection from the two types of Human Papilloma Virus that cause seven in 10 cases of cervical cancer, as well as two other types of the virus linked with genital warts. It is offered as a series of two injections over at least six months to UK schoolgirls aged 12 -13.

Dr Alice Forster, study author and Cancer Research UK scientist at University College London, said: "Although around 87 per cent of girls in the UK do have the vaccine it's concerning to see that some girls from some ethnic minority groups feel they don't need to have it.

Around 3010 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer every year in the UK. And 930 women die from the disease. The HPV vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent infection from HPV and reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer.

"Getting to the root of why some girls don't have the vaccine will help us address these barriers to ensure every girl can receive this protection against the disease," said Dr Forster.

Professor Charlie Swanton, NCRI chair and Cancer Research UK scientist at the Francis Crick Institute, said: "These are worrying findings. The HPV vaccine is safe and simple - and stopping HPV infection can help protect against cervical cancer developing. So it's crucial we find out what's stopping girls from defending themselves against the disease. Providing more information to both girls and their parents on the safety of the vaccine and addressing the perceived lack of need for it is the first step."

Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, said: "As someone with an ethnic minority background myself and as a parent, this study highlights a very worrying reason why girls from some minority groups don't get the HPV vaccine. Gaining insight into the discussions at home and why girls chose not to be vaccinated against HPV is crucial to make sure we provide families with the best information and the confidence to take up the vaccination when invited to do so."

Source:
Cancer Research UK

