

8. Importance of the HPV Vaccine and why it's recommended for girls

Key Messages

- The human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine is safe and is highly effective at preventing HPV infections and cervical cancer.
- HPV is the most common sexually-transmitted infection in the world and is responsible for cervical cancer. Not all people who are infected by HPV will develop cancer, but HPV puts females at high risk for the cancer.
- Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women living in less developed countries and often results in death because it is not detected early and treated appropriately. However, it is preventable.
- Many people have not heard of HPV and cervical cancer, so it is important to take time to explain and answer any questions about these health issues. It also helps if the vaccine is called, “the vaccine against cervical cancer” since more people are familiar with cancer as a disease and are more likely to know that the cervix is part of the female reproductive system.
- More than eighty countries have introduced the vaccine against cervical cancer into their national immunization schedules and additional countries are doing so every year. Around 270 million doses of HPV vaccine has been administered in the past 10 years worldwide.
- The safety of the vaccine has been closely monitored and results show no safety issues and it does not affect girls' fertility.
- In most countries, the priority group to receive the vaccine against cervical cancer is girls ages 9-14, since this is typically prior to the debut of sexual activity.
- If girls receive the vaccine when they are 9-14 years old, they need two doses with at least 6 months between doses. If they are 15 years old or older, 3 doses are needed.
- Some people have concerns that the vaccine will increase sexual activity in girls. This has not been proven to be the case in multiple country evaluations. The vaccine is more effective if provided before girls are exposed to HPV through sexual activity.
- Many people who receive the vaccine do not experience side effects, but it is also normal to experience mild side effects such as pain or redness at site of injection, fever, headache, fatigue, nausea, muscle or joint pain.

Corresponding FAQs

None

Characters

FLW 1	<i>Miriam</i>
Girl	<i>Aida</i>

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Narrator: It's great that you decided to listen to Audio Job Aid number 8. In it you will hear a conversation between a frontline worker named Miriam and a young girl named Aida. Miriam is promoting the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine, also known as the HPV vaccine or vaccine to prevent cervical cancer. Miriam is making sure that girls like Aida have their questions answered before they get the vaccine. During the Audio Job Aid, think about what other questions a girl might ask about the vaccine and how you would respond if you were in Miriam's place. Let's get started...

Miriam: Hello, my name is Miriam and I am a frontline worker responsible for the immunization program. How are you today?

Aida: Hello, I'm fine. Well I was, but at school I have been hearing lots of talk about immunization and I am a bit worried because I don't like needles... Why are you visiting me? I thought I had finished all my immunizations when I was a young child?

Miriam: Well, you know, there are a few immunizations that require a booster dose after some years. But also there are sometimes new vaccines that are developed, and that is what I am here today to talk to you about. It's a new vaccine that prevents cervical cancer.

Aida: Well, I know that cancer is bad, but I've never heard of cervical cancer. What exactly does this vaccine do and what does it have to do with me?

Miriam: You are smart to ask those questions, Aida. Firstly, cervical cancer is one of the most common and deadly cancers affecting women. Even though it is so common and deadly, many people have not heard of it. The new vaccine doesn't guarantee that you will not get cervical cancer, but it prevents you from getting a common disease that puts females at high risk for cervical cancer. So this new vaccine greatly reduces the chance of getting cervical cancer and protects against some other cancers and health issues.

Aida: Oh, well, I guess it is good to be protected, but I also heard some of my friends talking about getting the HPV vaccine – do I have to get that one too?

Miriam: In fact, the HPV vaccine is another name for the vaccine to prevent cervical cancer. HPV, or human papilloma virus, is the name of the infection that the vaccine prevents. So you don't have to get two different vaccines, just one...

Aida: Oh, hmm... my mother said she doesn't want me getting the HPV vaccine, but she didn't say why.

Miriam: That is something I hear from many caregivers. Some are concerned about the safety of the new vaccine, and others question why their daughter has to get a vaccine against a sexually transmitted disease when their daughter is still so young.

Aida: Well is it safe? And why do I have to get it now?

Miriam: The vaccine is completely safe and causes only minor side effects. Just like many other vaccines, mild side effects include pain or redness at site of injection, fever, headache, fatigue, nausea, muscle or joint pain. But these go away after a few days, so they are nothing to be concerned about. In fact, the vaccine is recognized as being safe that over 80 countries have introduced the vaccine, and it is being monitored in those countries and around the world. It's also important to note that it does not harm girls' fertility or ability to have children.

Aida: That's good to know. I definitely hope to have my own kids one day. But back to my question about why I have to get it now?

Miriam: The vaccine is recommended for girls between 9 and 14 years old. This is because it is very important for girls to receive the vaccine before they are sexually active to ensure they are protected when they do become sexually active. How old are you now, Aida??

Aida: I am 11 years old.

Miriam: A very smart and mature 11 year old! Well I have some more good news for you, because you are younger, you only need two doses of the vaccine with at least 6 months in between injections.

Aida: I guess that is good news. But I don't know that I'm ready for it today, and I really don't know that my mother will approve.

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Miriam: That's ok, I completely understand. This is a lot of new information, and I know that needles can be scary, although I can assure you that I have given many injections over the years, so I have lots of practice at making it quick and painless! Please take your time to think about it, and if you or your mother has any questions or concerns, I am happy to address them.

Aida: Thank you. I want to protect myself so I can be strong and healthy enough to continue my studies, get a good job and have a family of my own someday. When I think about those big goals, I can see that they are more important than feeling a small bit of pain from a quick injection...

Miriam: That's a very good point but please take your time to think about it, and if you need more information or when you make your decision, I will be here to help. I'm privileged to be able to have a job that helps protect the health of infants and children, like yourself, who are our bright future!

Narrator: Has the HPV vaccine been introduced in your country? If so, maybe you have been asked similar questions to those that Aida asked. Even if those questions haven't come up, or if the vaccine has not yet been introduced in your country, it is important to keep in mind the messages and skills demonstrated by Miriam. Children like Aida may seem young but they can understand much more than we often give them credit for, and they deserve to have a chance to ask questions just like adult caregivers. I hope you found this Audio Job Aid to be helpful for when you have to promote the HPV vaccine in your community.