Cervical cancer vaccinations case study

*In the UK 12-year-old girls are offered the vaccine – why? Read on and decide what you think about this population problem*

**Background briefing**

Cervical cancer was once a common form of cancer. It is now less common in some countries due to the success of cervical screening programmes.

Many countries have also introduced vaccines that help protect against the disease. They do not prevent cervical cancer directly but protect against infection by the two types of HPV (human papillomavirus) that cause 70 per cent of cervical cancer cases.

These viruses are common and are acquired through sexual activity. Sometimes HPV goes away on its own, and most women who are infected will not go on to develop cervical cancer. For those that do, the disease is treatable.

**In the UK:**

Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer in the UK will live for at least ten years. However, by offering the vaccine to girls at a young age free-of-charge, it is hoped that HPV transmission and cervical cancer can be prevented. Like other viruses, the circulation of HPV in the population depends on there being enough susceptible individuals to allow it to spread. Men can carry the virus too and, rarely, develop other types of HPV-related cancer, including genital cancers.

**Imagine...**

You’re a 12-year-old girl deciding whether to get vaccinated for HPV. Currently it's up to the individual to decide whether or not to have the vaccination, not their parents.

- Would you get vaccinated?
- What are the implications for you personally if you decide not to get vaccinated?
- What are the implications for the wider population if you decide not to get vaccinated?
- Should boys be offered vaccination too? Why do you think they aren’t? (Hint: think about the concept of herd immunity.)

**ABOUT THIS RESOURCE**

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