

Media Release

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Australia set to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035

Australia is set to become the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer following the success of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination program and the changes to the National Cervical Screening Program.

New research from Cancer Council NSW, being presented this week at the International Papilloma Virus Conference (IPVC 2018) in Sydney and published in *The Lancet Public Health*, has shown that if vaccination and screening coverage are maintained at their current rates, cervical cancer is likely to be eliminated as a public health issue within 20 years.

The new research predicts that cervical cancer rates will drop to less than 6 in 100,000 by 2022 – meaning that it will soon be considered a rare cancer. Rates will continue to drop further, dropping below 4 in 100,000 by 2035. These findings indicate that Australia is on-track to be the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer by successfully implementing a combined approach to vaccination and screening.

Professor Karen Canfell, Director of Research at Cancer Council NSW said, “The World Health Organization recently called for action to eliminate cervical cancer. This is such exciting news for women across Australia. We’ve been leading the way in cervical cancer control for many years and we’ll be sharing our research and approaches with the rest of the world as part of a global push to eliminate this highly preventable cancer.”

Australia transitioned to a new five-yearly HPV cervical screening test for those aged 25-74 from last year, replacing the old two-yearly Pap test previously offered from ages 18-69 years. The new test looks for the presence of HPV, the virus that causes almost all cervical cancers, and is expected to lower cervical cancer cases and mortality by at least 20%.

Professor Canfell added, “To achieve elimination, it’s vital that women continue to participate in the National Cervical Screening Program and that girls and boys are vaccinated against HPV through the national HPV immunisation program. Under the new screening program, women should have their first screening test at age 25 and then every five years, if no high risk HPV is detected.

“Those who have previously had the Pap test should have their next cervical screening test two years after their last Pap test, after which point they can move to five-yearly screening.”

The new research on cervical cancer elimination is just some of the new research being presented at the International Papillomavirus meeting this week, which is being held at the Sydney International Convention Centre. Professor Ian Frazer, from The University of Queensland who co-invented the HPV vaccine and co-authored the new study said, “This week, researchers from around the world will gather in Sydney to hear the latest insights in the control of HPV-related cancers. Delegates from other countries are eager to learn from the public health successes we have achieved in Australia.”

“We have taken major steps forward with HPV vaccination, and with the introduction of the new screening program and now this new Cancer Council research predicts that we will be the first country in the world to achieve the elimination of cervical cancer.”

Silvia de Sanjose, President of the International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) said “We are excited to host the 2018 meeting in Sydney. Australia has been at the forefront of HPV

research from key innovations in immunology and vaccine development through to the implementation of large scale vaccination initiatives and the transition to HPV-based cervical screening.

Dr. de Sanjose added: “We will be paying special attention to the challenges of building on the Australian success in HPV control, in populations that are most vulnerable to HPV disease worldwide, including Indigenous communities and those in low and middle income countries.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

The threshold for elimination:

This year, The World Health Organization (WHO) called for an acceleration in the elimination of cervical cancer. This will involve scaling up increasing global vaccination rates against HPV and cervical screening efforts, which will ultimately reduce mortality from cervical cancer. Although the definition of cervical cancer elimination has not yet been set by the WHO, the potential threshold considered in the new research was an incidence of below 4 in 100,000.

About the IPVC 2018 meeting:

The 32nd International Papillomavirus Conference will be held October 2-6 in Sydney, Australia. A total of 1,300 researchers, clinicians and other health professionals from all around the world will gather to share knowledge and ideas on papillomaviruses and their associated diseases as they work toward global control of HPV disease.

The conference will include lectures, oral abstract sessions, poster sessions, symposia and workshops.

About *The Lancet Public Health* article:

The research was conducted by Professor Karen Canfell, Director of Research at Cancer Council NSW and her team and will be published today in *The Lancet Public Health*. The findings will also be presented this week at the International Papillomavirus Conference (IPVC).

For more information please contact:

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