

NHS Southwark
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Dear parent,

HPV vaccination

I am writing to provide you with reassurance about the safety of the HPV vaccine that is used to reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

Preliminary results from the autopsy on the young girl from Coventry who sadly died after receiving HPV vaccine suggest that she had a rare and grave underlying medical condition that was likely to have caused her death. Indications are that it was most unlikely that the HPV vaccination was the cause of death. Further information is available at www.coventrypct.nhs.uk.

Since September 2008 there has been a national programme to vaccinate girls aged 12-13 against human papilloma virus (HPV). There is also a three-year catch up campaign that will offer the HPV vaccine to 13-18 year old girls. In the UK, more than 1.4 million doses have been given since the vaccination programme started.

HPV is a virus that infects the deepest layer of the skin or genital surfaces. The virus is transmitted through sexual contact and is very common, with over half of all women becoming infected at some point in their lifetime.

The vaccination programme aims to prevent young women from developing cervical cancer. In the UK, about 3000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer every year and about 1000 die from it. The vaccine protects against HPV strains 16 and 18 which are responsible for over 70% of all cervical cancers in the UK. This is the cancer Jade Goody had.

The safety and effectiveness of the vaccine was tested rigorously in clinical trials. These data were reviewed by the European Medicine Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use before a license was granted for its use in Europe.

There is no reason to suspend HPV immunisation and NHS Southwark will be continuing with the immunisation programme as it is the best way of protecting your child against cervical cancer. We strongly recommend you allow your child to receive this vaccine.

Further information is available on the NHS immunisation website (www.immunisation.nhs.uk/hpv), which is regularly updated.

Yours faithfully



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