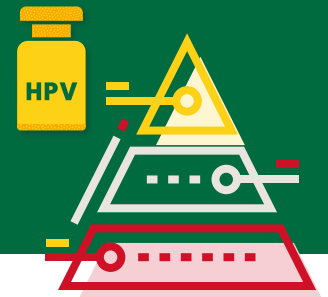


# The Case for HPV Vaccine Introduction in Ghana



**Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a leading cause of cervical cancer, a life-threatening disease that affects thousands of women in Ghana each year** (1). Safe, effective vaccines to prevent HPV infection have been available for more than 15 years. Ghana has yet to introduce this vaccine nationally as part of its routine immunization program, despite a growing emphasis on cancer control over the past decade (2). The central role HPV vaccines can play to protect the country's girls and young women has yet to be fully realized. Now is the time to prioritize introduction of HPV vaccines in Ghana, and action is needed to make this urgent need a reality.

## Why does Ghana need HPV vaccines?

To prevent cervical cancer and save lives.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among Ghanaian women, second only to breast cancer, with **nearly 3,000 new cases of cervical cancer and approximately 1,700 cervical cancer-related deaths in 2020 alone** (1). If we do not intervene, these rates are expected to rise over time and millions of mothers, daughters, and sisters will remain at risk. We need to act now to reduce and even eliminate the burden of cervical cancer in Ghana going forward.

Research has shown that **one of the most effective ways to control cervical cancer is to prevent the disease before it develops**. Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are linked to HPV, and this viral infection is preventable with the use of safe, effective vaccines. HPV vaccines offer long-lasting protection against infection for girls and young women (3,4) making them an effective long-term solution. It is time for Ghana to join the 130+ countries around the world that have already introduced HPV vaccines into their national routine immunization programs and provide this life-saving intervention immediately to protect young women now and into the future.

## How would HPV vaccines be made available?

HPV vaccines can be delivered to young girls at school or in the community, and just one dose can effectively provide long-lasting protection.

**WHO recommends HPV vaccination for girls aged 9–14 years** (5). A comprehensive national approach is needed to ensure that all girls in the country have access to this vaccine. To reach the greatest number of girls possible, **HPV vaccines can be provided through primary schools, combined with outreach activities to reach out-of-school girls**. This approach was successfully implemented in a 2013 pilot program in the Northern and Greater Accra regions (6) and can be expanded nationwide. WHO updated its HPV vaccine recommendation in December 2022 to support a single-dose schedule based on a growing body of evidence (5). This recommendation is based on findings from studies including the KEN SHE trial, conducted in Kenya, which demonstrated that a single dose of HPV vaccine is highly effective to protect against HPV infection (7). **Delivering a single dose of this important vaccine to girls in Ghana may be easier and more efficient**, because there will be no need for tracking to deliver follow-up doses and more girls can be protected while using fewer resources (8).

# What are the cost implications of HPV vaccine introduction in Ghana?

Introducing the HPV vaccine in Ghana is a smart investment, because we would ultimately avoid paying a significant amount in cervical cancer treatment costs.

Although there are costs tied to rolling out a new vaccine, implementing an HPV vaccine program in Ghana would prevent nearly 80,000 cervical cancer cases and more than 45,000 cervical cancer deaths over the next decade (8). **This program would also save tens of millions of dollars in treatment costs for cervical cancer.** Additionally, if Ghana adopts a single-dose strategy, as many countries have already done, this will reduce the price of introduction and make the program even more cost-effective (9).

Ghana is eligible to receive support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which is revitalizing its HPV Programme in 2023 to accelerate vaccine introduction. **Ghana is in the accelerated transition phase of Gavi support so is currently eligible to receive support for operations and delivery costs of HPV vaccination** for a limited period of time, making it all the more urgent to introduce this life-saving vaccine.

## The cost of inaction may be devastating, and it is time to act now.



Local and national **decision makers must be called on to prioritize HPV vaccination** and ensure that all girls have access to these vaccines.



Awareness must be raised about the **link between HPV infection and cervical cancer** to illustrate the urgent importance of addressing this preventable disease.



Adolescents and their parents as well as political, cultural, and religious stakeholders must be engaged and **multi-sector collaboration must be built** between the Ministries of Health and Education, the cancer community, and the media.



**These groups will need to work together to move HPV vaccination forward** through evidence-based planning and implementation, building trust and credibility, and the use of strategic communication and innovative mass media approaches.

**Cervical cancer is preventable, and introducing HPV vaccines into schools and health systems across Ghana is the first step to eliminate this devastating disease.**

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