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India Launches Nationwide HPV Vaccination Drive to Prevent Cervical Cancer

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Why In News?

The Government of India has announced a free, nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme aimed at reducing the high burden of cervical cancer among women. The drive will initially target 14-year-old girls with a single-dose voluntary vaccine administered through government health facilities across all States and Union Territories during February–March 2026.

Key Features of the HPV Vaccination Drive

Target Group & Schedule:

The campaign focuses on girls aged 14 years, covering nearly 1.15 crore beneficiaries annually.

Vaccination will be provided free of cost at designated government health centres including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, Primary Health Centres, etc.

Vaccine Type:

A single-dose Gardasil-4 vaccine (quadrivalent) will be used, protecting against HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18 — with types 16 and 18 responsible for most cervical cancers

Voluntary & Safety Measures:

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The programme is voluntary and free, with vaccination sessions supervised by trained Medical Officers, and linked to 24×7 medical facilities for post-vaccination observation.

Implementation Mechanism:

Vaccine supplies have been secured through partnerships with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and approved by India's drug regulator.

Public Health Strategy:

After the initial catch-up phase, HPV vaccination is expected to be integrated into India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

Why It Matters

Cervical Cancer Burden:

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India, causing nearly 80,000 new cases and over 42,000 deaths annually. Vaccination targets the root cause — persistent infection with high-risk HPV types.

Disease Prevention:

HPV infection — especially types 16 and 18 — is responsible for around 90% of cervical cancer cases. Vaccination before exposure can reduce cancer incidence dramatically.

Global Health Context:

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends HPV vaccination for adolescent girls (and ideally boys) before sexual activity, as a key strategy to prevent cervical cancer.

Economic and Social Impact:

By reducing the cervical cancer burden, India can lower treatment costs, improve female health outcomes, and enhance women's participation in education and the workforce.

Integration with Existing Health Systems:

Leveraging the UIP and India's network of government health facilities ensures broad vaccine coverage and strengthens routine immunisation infrastructure.

Additional Facts:

Human Papillomavirus (HPV):

HPV is a group of viruses; some high-risk types (e.g., 16 and 18) cause cervical and other cancers.

HPV vaccination also prevents genital warts and can indirectly protect against anal, penile, and throat cancers.

Vaccine Types:

Gardasil-4: Quadrivalent vaccine used in the national programme.

Cervavac: India's first indigenously developed HPV vaccine (quadrivalent), approved in 2022.

Screening & Preventive Care:

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Vaccination should complement cervical screening programmes (e.g., Pap smear) for older women, especially as screening coverage in India remains low.

Global Adoption:

More than 160 countries have introduced HPV vaccination into their national immunisation schedules, reflecting a global commitment to cervical cancer elimination.