

Pharmacies ideally suited for HPV vaccination of young people and should be included in new campaign



The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has welcomed the recent announcement by the Minister of Health of his intentions to introduce an HPV vaccine catch-up programme. The IPU is now calling on the Minister for Health to utilise pharmacies which, it argues, are ideally placed to deliver the campaign.

The campaign will involve the provision of the HPV vaccine to:

- Girls and boys in secondary school who were eligible to receive HPV vaccine in 1st year but who did not receive it; and
- Women up to the age of 25 years who have left secondary school and who did not receive the vaccine when eligible.

The IPU has commended the aims of this programme with IPU President Dermot Twomey saying, “The HPV vaccine is a proven, safe and effective vaccine. Not only does it protect women against the devastating impacts of cervical cancer, but it protects the entire population from many other side effects that can potentially result from an HPV infection. The decision to extend HPV vaccinations and provide this catch-up programme is extremely welcome. Ireland can eradicate cervical cancer within a generation, but only if there is high uptake of HPV vaccinations.”

According to Mr Twomey “Pharmacies are best placed to administer HPV vaccinations, particularly to women who, for any reason, did not receive one while at school. Pharmacies can provide the ideal environment for this service as they offer convenience, and flexibility and can support young people and their parents by answering any additional queries or concerns regarding this vaccine.

“The majority of the people eligible for this vaccine will either be students or those in early career jobs. Convenience will be key to maximising uptake, and that is what pharmacies offer to young adults with busy schedules. There is a pharmacy in practically every town in Ireland, often with long opening hours and weekend availability, which would provide women with the easiest and most convenient route to access an HPV vaccine.”

The importance of utilising pharmacies was highlighted by the played successful role in the COVID-19 vaccine campaign. “Pharmacists have been vaccinating people in communities for over a decade. There is widespread public support for this service, and the response to pharmacy vaccination was overwhelming with over 850,000 COVID-19 vaccines administered by the pharmacy sector since June 2021.”

Dermot Twomey concluded by cautioning against relying solely on GP practices to administer the catch-up vaccinations to women out of school. “GPs are consistently raising concerns about their workloads and waiting lists have continued to grow. Pharmacists are fully qualified and trained vaccinators, and there is simply no need to create a bottleneck to accessing the HPV vaccine.”