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Yukon First Territory to Introduce HPV Vaccine

WHITEHORSE – Yukon will be the first territory to launch an immunization program for girls in grades five, six and seven against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Health and Social Services Minister Glenn Hart announced today.

“HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer, so we’re very pleased to offer this program to young girls,” Hart said. “The vaccine will be part of the school immunization program for 2008-09. It is voluntary and will require parental consent.”

This year government will be doing a “catch up program” and offer the vaccine to girls in grades five, six and seven; in subsequent years, the vaccine will be offered to grade five students only.

The announcement follows a recommendation from the Territorial Advisory Committee on Immunization (TACI) to add the HPV vaccine to the routine Yukon immunization schedule.

“The committee has recommended that we add this to our program because it will help provide protection to young women in the Yukon. Their decision was based on scientific evidence and is a nationally supported initiative,” Hart said. “The Department of Health and Social Services will be providing parents with information they can use to make decisions for and with their daughters.”

“We are confident that the vaccine is both safe and effective,” Yukon’s Medical Officer of Health Dr. Brendan Hanley added.

HPV is transmitted through sexual activity and is the cause of almost all cases of cervical cancer. The virus also causes genital warts and changes in the cells of the cervix which are seen when a pap test is conducted.

The maximum benefit of this vaccine can be achieved by providing it to girls before they become sexually active. The vaccine protects against HPV types that cause about 70 per cent of cervical cancer. It is licensed and recommended for females aged nine to 26 years of age in Canada and requires a series of three injections over a six month period.

Start-up funding for this preventative health program comes from the federal government. The estimated cost for this school-based program is \$284,000.

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