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HPV vaccine to be offered to boys

Boys aged between 12 and 13 are to be offered a vaccine for the first time to protect them against a viral infection which can cause some cancers.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination protects against the more important HPV strains and has been offered to girls in Jersey for free since 2008 to help prevent them developing cervical cancer and other HPV related cancers in years to come.

Health and Community Services is now extending its vaccination programme to prevent boys getting HPV-related cancers in later life.

Dr Ivan Muscat, Consultant Microbiologist said "There are at least 140 strains of HPV and the majority of the population are infected by one or more strains by person to person contact at some point in their lives. Most are harmless but some can go on to cause cancer. HPV is considered responsible for 5 per cent of all cancers".

Leading cancer charities have been campaigning for 12/13 year old boys to benefit from the vaccination. The vaccine is administered to Year 8 pupils as evidence shows this is the age at which the vaccine works best. This year group will be offered vaccination, which is given as two injections six months apart, starting from September 2019. Figures from 2017 – the latest statistics available – show that uptake of the vaccination among Year 8 girls is high with 89 percent being immunised.

Since the girls' vaccination programme began, the prevalence of HPV has been reducing. Dr Linda Diggle, Head of Preventive Programmes at Health and Community Services, said: "There's been a reduction in the amount of human papillomavirus in the population in the UK and elsewhere and this is a clear sign that the vaccine is effective. Evidence suggests that extending the vaccination programme to boys offers a real opportunity to make HPV related diseases an increasing rarity".

The announcement follows a move by England's Health Department to also extend the HPV vaccine to boys.

Health Minister Deputy Richard Renouf said: "Offering this vaccination to boys is a very positive step. Extending the immunisation programme now will reduce HPV-related cancers in both men and women in the future."