

## Addressing HPV Vaccine Hesitancy: A Call for Awareness and Action

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Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide. 95% of cervical cancer cases are due to untreated and persistent HPV infection of cervix.<sup>1</sup> Annually 500,000 women are affected by cervical cancer globally, leading to 270,000 deaths, or one every two minutes. The mortality rate of cervical cancer is high in developing countries including Pakistan accounting for 80% of mortality among women.<sup>2</sup> Every year, around 5008 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and out of them 3197 women die.<sup>3</sup> The world has achieved advancement in treating cervical cancer by introducing the human papilloma virus vaccine. According to a 2019 study carried out in Pakistan, just 51.3% of the women surveyed had heard of "cervical cancer." Of those who were interviewed further after hearing about cervical cancer, 64% lacked sufficient understanding, with only 40.2% being aware of the HPV vaccine.<sup>4</sup> While the HPV vaccine is widely recognized as a safe and effective treatment for cervical cancer, its acceptance in Pakistan is hampered by misconceptions, cultural taboos, and rumors spread through social media platforms by some uneducated, rigid-minded people. According to media officials, a total of 3,641,132 parents across the country refused to vaccinate their daughters. The public is now confused and afraid as a result of these baseless rumors, which have discouraged many parents from vaccinating their daughters. It is extremely alarming that false information is overshadowing scientific data. Some opponents fear that administering the HPV vaccine will encourage "immorality and infertility" among young girls because HPV is a sexually transmitted virus, and some people also have misjudged that it is unnecessary to vaccinate or that it contains harmful substances and is a part of some foreign agenda. These reasons are not medically justified and are socially detrimental. If Pakistan truly wants a betterment of women's health, we must take immediate actions such as campaigns to raise awareness among parents, guardians, and communities

about the need and safety of HPV vaccination. Bringing together religious and community leaders to address cultural taboos and clear falsely narrated misconceptions. Integrating the HPV vaccination into national immunization programs to ensure its safe administration and accessibility. We must emphasize on educating youth and their parents, as the vaccine is most beneficial when given around pubertal age, preferably between the ages of 9 and 14. We shouldn't let unreasonable fears put the health and future of our younger generations at risk. Society as a whole has an obligation to shelter our daughters.

### References

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