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Australian first: HPV vaccine prevents rare childhood disease

Adding to the list of world firsts in relation to the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, Australian researchers have published the first evidence internationally that HPV vaccine prevents recurrent respiratory papillomatosis (RRP).

Children with RRP typically present in the first few years of life with a hoarse voice or difficulty breathing and require multiple surgical treatments to keep their airways open. In some cases, a tracheostomy may be needed and sometimes the disease can be fatal.

The paper, published in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, reports the results of surveillance of the disease by the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit (APSU) and shows a near disappearance of the disease in the years since the HPV vaccination program was introduced in Australia.

Dr Daniel Novakovic, lead author and Ear, Nose and Throat surgeon and director of the Dr Liang Voice Program at University of Sydney said 'We used the APSU mechanism, whereby paediatricians and my fellow ENT colleagues treating these patients report any new cases they see every month. In the first five years of reporting we have seen a near disappearance of this disease with just one new case reported across the country in 2016. It is a wonderful effect of HPV vaccination and we are hopeful that in the future we won't see any more children suffering from this condition in Australia.'

The HPV vaccination program in Australia commenced in 2007 with a three year mass catch up vaccination program for females aged 12 to 26 years and is now given routinely to both males and females at age 12-13. The quadrivalent HPV vaccine used in the program protects against 4 HPV types, including types 6 and 11 which are the cause of genital warts.

The virus can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or birth and sometimes infects the baby's airways to cause RRP. Associate Professor Julia Brotherton, senior author and medical director of the National HPV Vaccination Program Register said "We know that since we introduced HPV vaccination we have seen huge declines in HPV infection, pre-cancers of the cervix and genital warts. This study adds new evidence that infection in mothers with the HPV types that cause warts and RRP are now very uncommon. So much so that RRP is disappearing in Australia. It's fantastic news and an added benefit of vaccination."

Co-author Clinical Associate Professor Alan Cheng of the University of Sydney who directs the airway assessment clinic at The Children's Hospital at Westmead commented "Over a

twenty-year period I have observed the suffering endured by patients and their families living with RRP, the multiple hospital admissions and operations to allow children the ability to breathe. I have attended many international forums to discuss how this condition should be better managed. It is a great relief to witness a way of preventing this often devastating illness and its long term psychosocial effects on the individuals involved.”

ABOUT

[The Journal of Infectious Diseases](#) is the premier global journal for original research on infectious diseases.

The National HPV Vaccination Program Register supports the HPV Vaccination program funded by the Australian Government and plays an essential role in monitoring and evaluating the program by recording information about the HPV vaccine. It is operated by the Victorian Cytology Service, an NGO dedicated to prevention of cancer and infectious disease through supporting public health programs.

www.hpvregister.org.au

www.vcs.org.au

The Children’s Hospital at Westmead is the highly respected, largest paediatric centre in NSW, providing excellent care for children from NSW, Australia and across the Pacific Rim. Founded in 1880, it forms part of the Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network (Randwick and Westmead).

The Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit (APSU) is a national resource, established in 1993 to facilitate active surveillance of uncommon rare childhood diseases, complications of common diseases or adverse effects of treatment. APSU is at Kids Research Institute, the research arm of The Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

www.apsu.org.au

Dr Liang Voice Program is a newly established, world-class research and training program in the field of laryngeal and voice disorders at the University of Sydney. The University of Sydney is a public research university. Founded in 1850, it is the oldest university in Australia.

Available for interview:

Patient with recurrent respiratory papillomatosis (RRP)

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