

From the Chief Medical Officer  
**Dr Michael McBride**



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar**

**Principals of all post-primary schools  
teaching girls**

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Your Ref:  
Our Ref:  
Date: 30 September 2009

Dear Colleagues,

**Human Papilloma Virus vaccine**

You will be aware of the tragic case of a young girl in Coventry who died on Monday after receiving the HPV vaccine.

Until the final results of post mortem examinations and the results of investigations by the Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are known, it will not be possible to say with certainty whether this death was linked to the vaccination. Results of a preliminary post mortem examination indicate that the likely cause of death was a serious underlying health condition and that the vaccination is most unlikely to have caused this death.

Purely as a precautionary measure, the batch of vaccine from which this girl was vaccinated has been quarantined. Around 11,500 doses from this batch were delivered to Northern Ireland in May 2009 and measures were taken yesterday to ensure that all doses from this batch are quarantined. School nurses and GP practices have been advised not to use doses from this batch until the results of testing are known.

I have issued a press statement urging parents and children not to be unduly concerned. The quarantining of the batch of vaccine is a precautionary measure while this tragic death in England is being fully investigated.

It is important that we have the results of further investigations as soon as possible to establish the cause of death. The MHRA is investigating the death as a priority. It may take some weeks to establish definitively whether the death was related to Cervarix or due to natural causes, but there are already indications emerging that there were other causal factors. I will write to school principals when the results of these investigations are known.

In the meantime the HPV programme will continue, using stocks from different batches.

Understandably, parents and their children will be concerned about HPV immunisation. The vaccine, Cervarix, has a strong safety record. In Northern Ireland around 30,000 doses of Cervarix have been administered as part of the routine programme for 12- and 13-year-old girls since the programme started in September 2008 and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has not received any serious adverse incident reports related to this vaccine in Northern Ireland. It is important at this time for parents who are worried to listen to the advice of GPs and school nurses, who can allay their fears.

Maintaining a high uptake is important, as each year in Northern Ireland approximately 80 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed, resulting in between 30 and 40 deaths per annum. Our long term aim for the HPV immunisation programme is to reduce cervical cancer by 70%. In Northern Ireland, in the first year of the routine programme 89% of girls received the first dose; 85% received the second dose and 83% received the third dose.

This high uptake rate owes much to the support that schools have generously provided in facilitating and accommodating the programme. I am grateful for your continuing support for the programme.

Yours sincerely



**DR MICHAEL McBRIDE**  
**Chief Medical Officer**

cc Public Health Agency  
HSC Trusts  
ELBs  
CCMS