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# Support for male HPV vaccination grows

By Lucy Warhurst

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Health experts are supporting a proposal to vaccinate boys against human papillomavirus (HPV), saying it will help save lives.

The HPV vaccine has been available free to girls in New Zealand since 2008 and now Pharmac is calling for public feedback on its proposal to widen funding.

"Boys are definitely at risk of HPV-related cancers, hence the importance of extending the vaccine to everybody in the community," says Dr Nikki Turner from the Immunisation Advisory Centre.

While the human papillomavirus is commonly associated with cervical cancer, about a third of all HPV-related cancers occur in men and surgeon John Chaplin says rates are on the rise.

"Recently what we've seen is an increase in the rate of throat cancer -- oropharyngeal cancer -- the rates of that have been recognised to double over the past 20 years," he says.

Ninety percent of oropharyngeal cancers are HPV-related and the virus is also linked to a number of others.

"It's associated with cancers of the mouth, the throat, the genital regions, the anus, many of these cancers are on the increase in the world," Dr Turner says.



Under the current scheme, 61 percent of eligible girls have been immunised.

It's hoped that by rolling out the vaccine to boys next year, it will prevent such cancers in the future.

### **HPV Facts:**

HPV passed on by direct skin to skin contact – particularly sexual contact

Nearly everyone will become infected with HPV at some point in their lives, but the vast majority of infections will be cleared by the body on their own

HPV causes both genital warts and a range of cancers and about

a third of all HPV-related cancers occur among males

The rates of both anal and oral cancers are on the rise among men and it's believed changes in sexual behaviour are a major driving force in these rates

Gay and bisexual men experience rates of anal cancer equivalent to that of cervical cancer among women. These men are currently left out of the current vaccination programme, but will be covered by the proposed changes

HPV is estimated to be responsible for:

35 percent of all oral cancers

50 percent of all penile cancers

85 percent of all anal cancers

Source: University of Auckland.

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