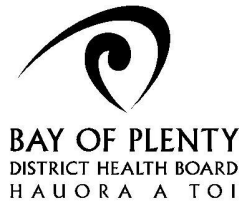


Media Release

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7 October 2009

Young women most at risk of HPV infection

Young women attending a series of workshops at Te Puna's Pirirakau Hauora last month heard why it's important to get vaccinated against cervical cancer when they are younger to protect themselves.

HPV (Human Papillomavirus) is a very common virus spread most commonly through sexual contact. Most HPV infections clear by themselves, but some infections can lead to cervical cancer many years later. The HPV vaccine, Gardasil, protects women from contracting the virus.

Nga Mataapuna Oranga Primary Health Organisation Director of Nursing Orana Harris says an estimated 80% of sexually active women are affected by HPV with the peak incidence of infection occurring between the ages of 16-19.

"The earlier girls get vaccinated the better," says Orana. "But if they are already sexually active they should still get the vaccine. There are four types of HPV the vaccine protects against, and it's unlikely young women would have been exposed to all of them."

Orana says international trials indicate the vaccine immune response remains high after seven years and evidence suggests the immune memory could be lifelong.

"We know that girls who get vaccinated at 12-13 years old will be protected through the most vulnerable years when they are most at risk of contracting an HPV infection."

The HPV presentation was part of Pirirakau Hauora's two-day women's health programme which included workshops on personal hygiene, grooming, development and awareness for 15-19 year-olds.

Larissa Johnson, who is one of the coordinators of Pirirakau Hauora's Rangatahi service Tu Pou Tahī, says the two days were about 'looking after our wahine'.

"Ten years ago there was nothing like this; it was all classroom-based information. But this is how they learn best – 'show me don't tell me'", says Larissa.

HPV facts:

- The HPV vaccine, Gardasil, protects against the main viruses responsible for cervical cancer and genital warts.
- It is available free of charge to girls and young women born after 1 January 1990.
- Eligible young women who have left school can get the free vaccine from their GP or health clinic.
- A schools programme began this year to vaccinate girls in Years 8-13.
- Three doses are needed over six months for the vaccination to be fully effective.
- Every year around 160 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in New Zealand and 60 women die from it.

For further information: www.cervicalcancervaccine.govt.nz

End.



Caption:

Young women attendees and organisers of Pirirakau Hauora's two days of women's health workshops show it takes three doses of the HPV vaccine to be protected against cervical cancer. Nga Mataapuna Oranga PHO Director of Nursing Orana Harris (right) showed a video about a woman who had survived the trauma of cervical cancer, and spoke about the vaccine.