

## Charity voices concern as HPV vaccine school programme stalls

Health experts are encouraging young people to ensure they get the HPV vaccine, as recent statistics reveal that approximately one-in-six girls and one-in-five boys in England remain unvaccinated by the time they reach school year 10.

The HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine provides protection against various cancers, including mouth, head & neck, cervical, anal, and genital cancers, impacting both girls and boys.

Administered to all 12-13-year-olds in schools and community clinics, parental consent is necessary for their child to receive the vaccine from NHS nurses.

School closures and pupil absences caused HPV vaccination rates to plummet during COVID-19.

Yet, new figures reveal vaccine coverage remains significantly lower than before the pandemic. Data reveal that by the end of this school year, over 50,000 girls and more than 70,000 boys in year 10 didn't get vaccinated against HPV.

Dr Nigel Carter, CEO of the Oral Health Foundation said: 'In the wake of the pandemic, our hopes for a swift recovery in HPV vaccination rates for children have been disappointed by current figures. It is concerning that the post-pandemic rebound of the programme has yet to materialise.'

'The HPV vaccine is a proven and effective measure in preventing HPV-related cancers, such as mouth cancer. By vaccinating children early, we not only

shield them from these life-threatening diseases but also contribute to the overall reduction of HPV prevalence within our communities.'

Starting with the current 2023/24 school year, the HPV vaccine is being offered to most under-25s as a single dose instead of two doses, in light of updated guidance from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The latest statistics indicate that during the academic year 2022/23, there was a slight increase in vaccination rates for both boys and girls in year 8 compared to the previous year (2021-22).

However, there was a decline in uptake for years 9 and 10. Specifically, the vaccination rate for year 9 girls decreased from 82.2% to 75.7%, year 10 girls from 86.5% to 83.2%, year 9 boys from 77.6% to 69.7%, and year 10 boys from 81.5% to 78.6%.

Since its release in 2008, the HPV vaccination programme has protected millions of children from cancers and diseases in the future.

Dr Catherine Tannahill, Director of Dentistry at Portman-Dentex said: 'The UK HPV vaccination programme stands as one of the world's most successful initiatives, having administered millions of doses since its inception in 2008. This programme has significantly reduced rates of mouth cancer and harmful infections in both women and men, effectively preventing numerous cancers and saving lives.'

'Year 8 pupils, both girls and boys, have the opportunity to receive the HPV vaccine, and recent findings suggest that just one dose offers robust protection. We encourage all eligible individuals to seize this potentially life-saving vaccine when it becomes available.'

'For those who may have missed the initial vaccination, it's not too late. Contact your school nurse, school immunisation team, or GP practice to schedule an appointment, as catch-up options are accessible until you turn 25. Your health matters, and we're here to help you stay protected.'



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## Association of Dental Groups calls for reforms to the overseas registration exam to boost depleted workforce

The Association of Dental Groups (ADG) has restated its campaign to boost Britain's dental workforce after new data revealed that 40% of children don't have regular NHS check-ups and that 104,133 children went to hospital with rotten teeth over the past five years.

As Britain's dental crisis deteriorates, ADG is urging the General Dental Council (GDC) to speed up the approval of qualified dentists through the overseas registration exam (ORE).

At present, there is a bottleneck of 2,000 overseas dentists waiting to take the ORE, which is characterised by lengthy delays.

As Neil Carmichael, Chair of the ADG explains, 'That's 2,000 dentists that could be practising, at a time when the UK dentistry is crying out for greater resource.'

He continued: 'The government needs to use every tool at its disposal to encourage the GDC to make it easier for dentists to practise in the UK, by increasing the number of places on the ORE and holding

them more frequently. A net increase of just 1,000 dentists could deliver access to NHS primary dental care for up to 750,000 people. This will alleviate the pressure on health services and ensure that everyone in the UK has access to quality dental care.'

While the ADG fully supports the NHS long-term workforce plan to increase UK training of dentists, this will only see significant increases in qualified dentists from mid-2030. By that time, many NHS dental practices will be closed.