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HPV vaccine prevents cervical cancer cases in deprived groups: study

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THE HINDU BUREAU

The human papillomavirus, or HPV, vaccine is cutting cases of cervical cancer right across the socio-economic spectrum, with most cases being prevented in more deprived groups, according to a major study funded by Cancer Research UK.

Until now, there had been concerns that the HPV vaccine could have an unequal impact across society. After carrying out the longest follow-up on the effectiveness of the HPV vaccine, researchers at the Queen Mary University of London concluded the HPV vaccination programme in England is helping to close some inequalities in cervical cancer. The results were published in the journal *BMJ*.

Due to a typically higher incidence of cervical cancer in more deprived groups, researchers found that more cases were prevented in the most deprived group (around 190), compared to the least deprived group (around 60) in a study that included approximately 6,50,000 people offered vaccination aged 12-18 years in each of the five deprivation groups. The study reflected the huge success of the school-based vaccination programme, showing that well-executed public health interventions can help to reduce health inequalities.

The study adds even more weight to evidence that HPV vaccination works. Researchers found that over a 12-year period, the vaccine reduced cervical cancer incidence rates by nearly 90% and pre-cancerous conditions by around 95% in women who were offered routine vaccination at 12-13 years old in England. The study shows that the vaccine is much more effective when taken up by children aged eight years (12-13 years) than later in life.

Although the life-saving HPV vaccine currently reaches people from all backgrounds, Cancer Research UK warns that some inequalities remain in cervical cancer incidence, and more work is needed to improve the health of the most deprived groups. Overall, cervical cancer rates are higher in people from deprived backgrounds across the U.K. Researchers said this is partly due to people being at greater risk from HPV and barriers that can drive lower screening attendance.

Cancer Research U.K. scientists helped to prove the link between HPV and cervical cancer 25 years ago. Cervical cancer rates in the U.K. have fallen by almost a third since the early 1990s. The HPV vaccination programme was first introduced to England in 2008.