

HPV VACCINE SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMME AND CANCER SCREENING SHOULD BE EXPANDED

99% of cervical cancer is caused by HPV

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the world. There are more than 200 known HPV variants, and some have been proven to cause cancers in various parts of the body. It is known that 99% of cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV.

There are more than 200 types of HPV. Although the immune system eliminates many of these types within 2 years, HPV16 and HPV18 types can cause cancer in the cervix, vagina, penis, anus, head and neck region and throat, while HPV6 and HPV11 types can cause warts in various parts of the body.

Today, there are vaccines developed against the most cancer-causing types of HPV with high protection. However, these vaccines are not included in the national health insurance (GSS) coverage in Turkey. As of February 2022, the price of the vaccine is approximately 1750₺ (125 EUR) for three doses. The high cost is a major barrier hindering access to the vaccine in Turkey, where the vaccination rate is only 0.9%.

Free screening and pap smear tests are currently carried out by the Ministry of Health through Cancer Early Diagnosis, Screening and Education Centers (KETEM in Turkish). However, only women aged 30-65 are eligible for this screening and the test can only be made on samples taken from the cervix.

In this context, it is very important for everyone to benefit from the HPV vaccination and screening services in order to stop the spread of the virus.

Vaccine and screening costs are lower than cancer treatment

- The vaccine protects against HPV and prevents the infection from causing cancer.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends nationwide screening of cervical cancer in all countries.
- HPV screening policies in Turkey only cover women between the ages of 30-65 and only cervix screening although the virus affects everyone and can cause cancers in areas other than the cervix (penis, anus, vagina, mouth, throat). The dissemination of KETEMs and the widening of the scope of the tests will prevent possible cancers and reduce the costs of treatment.
- According to the 10-year data, in the countries that include HPV vaccination in their national immunization program, there is a 90% reduction in cervical cases.
- The preventive services such as screening and vaccination are more cost effective than the treatment services for cervix cancer.

1.www.ilacrehberi.com/v/gardasil-kuadivalan-human-papillomavirus-tip-6-11-b0f8/ilac-fiyati-2021/

2.www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240014107

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Table 2: Cancer (Breast-Bowel and Cervix) Screening and Treatment Costs (3)

Cancer Types	Screening Costs (TRY/EUR)	Treatment Cost (TRY/EUR)
Breast-Bowel	1196,90 / 375.94	55,375,000 / 17,393,284.54
Cervix	2671,89 / 839.24	59,323,750 / 18,633,586.70
Total	3868,79 / 1215.18	114,698,750 / 36,026.87

The laws and regulations in force allow the HPV vaccination to be included in the national immunization programme and to expand and disseminate the scope of screening.

Health Services Fundamental Law is based on the free provision of vaccination services in the execution of public health services (4).

The Public Health Law, the Infectious Diseases Surveillance and Control Principles Regulation and the Fight Against Infectious Diseases Guide protect public health in the fight against infectious diseases such as HPV. The KETEM Regulation allows for the dissemination and expansion of screening. With the regulation to be made in the Health Implementation Communiqué (SUT), it can be ensured that the vaccines of the age group outside the vaccination calendar are prescribed.

HPV vaccines should be free of charge

- The vaccine, developed against cancer-and wart-causing types of HPV and effective against 9 types of HPV, should be included in the national immunization programme.
- For the age groups outside the immunization programme, the vaccine should be included in the scope of public health insurance.
- Throat and anal screening should be included in the scope of screening methods.
- Screening services should cover all adults.

The scope of HPV screening should be broadened

Although HPV is responsible for 99% of cervical cancer, it does not only cause cancer in women or only in the cervix. For this reason, the scope of HPV screening should be expanded for everyone. The HPV testing and screening methods should be broadened by including cervical, anal and throat screenings.

3. "Comparing Preventative Health Expenditure with the Therapeutic Health Expenditure in Terms of the Cost Caused by Cancer Disease in Turkey", Ridvan KARACAN & Zişan KILIÇKAN, 2016, pg 51

4. www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.3359.pdf

