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Media release

Perth women needed for international cervical cancer vaccine study

Perth women are being invited to take part in a global study of an exciting new vaccine that could protect against cervical cancer -- one of the most common causes of cancer-related deaths in women worldwide.

The Vaccine Trials Group at Perth's Telethon Institute for Child Health Research is seeking healthy women aged between 26 and 45 years of age for the study.

Dr Rachel Skinner, who heads the study in Perth, said previous studies of the vaccine have been with adolescents and young adults. This new study looks at its effectiveness in a wider age range and in women who have already been exposed to the human papillomavirus (HPV).

"We know from earlier studies that the vaccine is safe and effective in preventing human papillomavirus in younger women," Dr Skinner said.

"This study will determine what benefits there may be in giving the vaccine to a wider age group.

"What's particularly of interest is whether this vaccine can actually protect women who already have been exposed to HPV.

"If so, that would have enormous implications for women who have already had some abnormal pap smears as it could reduce the likelihood of them developing cervical cancer."

Dr Skinner said that vaccination of a broader age range could reduce overall cervical cancer rates in the community more quickly, as well as provide clinical benefits to the individual women.

Women will receive a three-dose course of vaccines -- either the cervical cancer vaccine or a "control" vaccine that does not contain any active medicine.

The study will last for three years with participants making a total of nine visits to the study centre.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of death from cancer in women worldwide. The World Health Organization recently estimated that 510,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 288,000 women die from the disease every year.

Cervical cancer can be caused by infection with a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV infection is caused through sexual contact and is very common. Approximately 75 per cent of women become infected with HPV at some time in their

lives, usually soon after the onset of sexual activity.

While most women are infected with HPV at some time in their lives, only a small number of these infections progress to cervical cancer. In developed countries such as Australia, most of these cases can be detected and treated early through regular Pap smears.

Although there are more than 100 different types of HPV, approximately 70 per cent of all cervical cancers are associated with infection with only two types, HPV 16 and HPV 18. These are the most important of the so-called 'high-risk', or oncogenic (cancer-causing) types of HPV.

The new cervical cancer vaccine is designed to protect against HPV 16 and HPV 18. The results of a recently completed study in younger women were very promising, with very high protection against infection and precancerous changes of the cervix.

"This study is an important step in the development of a vaccine that might protect women of all ages against developing cervical cancer," said Dr Skinner said.

"Women who participate in the study will be making a very valuable contribution to medical research and to improving women's health in the future."

The Vaccine Trials Group is a collaboration between the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

**TO FIND OUT MORE OR TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE STUDY, PHONE
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