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Scientific leaders signal major breakthroughs in elimination of cervical and anal cancers

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To mark International HPV Awareness Day March 4th 2022, the International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) has warmly welcomed two major advances in the elimination of cervical and anal cancers.

HPV (human papillomavirus) is associated with 630,000 cancer diagnoses around the world. Almost all cases of cervical and anal cancers are caused by HPV. These cancers lead to 470,000 deaths, over 300,000 of which are due to cervical cancer. Current tools for the prevention of HPV-related cancers are: vaccination for girls and boys; cervical screening and the treatment of cervical pre-cancers in women.

Vaccination of young adolescents with two vaccine doses has been the recommended standard of care for several years. However, the UK Government's Joint Commission on Vaccination and Immunization has just issued interim advice recommending a shift to a single dose schedule.

The proposed change has been warmly welcomed by IPVS President Prof Suzanne Garland, who said, "The evidence that a single dose vaccine schedule for HPV offers a high degree of protection against the types of HPV that cause cancer is now clear. The benefits of this, in terms of logistics, workforce and costs represent a potential game-changer, particularly for low- and middle-income countries. One less jab and the elimination of cervical cancer within a generation would really mean one less worry for the world."

Another significant recent breakthrough in the prevention of HPV-related cancer is the ANCHOR study into anal cancer prevention which has found that pre-cancerous changes in the anus can be treated to halt progression of anal cancer in a similar way to cervical cancer. Over 50,000 people are diagnosed with anal cancer each year.