

MEETING : HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE : 18 NOVEMBER 2009

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CENTRAL AND EASTERN CHESHIRE PCT HPV VACCINATION PROGRAMME AGAINST CERVICAL CANCER

BACKGROUND

On Monday 28th September 2009, the safety of the national HPV vaccination programme came under scrutiny following the death of 14 year-old Natalie Morton on the same day as her HPV immunisation. The PCT took a precautionary decision on Tuesday 29th September to suspend the local HPV vaccination programme for the remainder of that week while further information was sought about the death. The post-mortem in Coventry found that Natalie's death was caused by a large malignant tumour affecting her heart and lungs, and that the HPV vaccine did not play a role.

A recent review by the Commission on Human Medicines has shown that Cervarix HPV vaccine has an excellent safety record. Around 2,100 suspected side-effects have been reported following the administration of over 1.4 million doses of Cervarix vaccine during its first year of use. Most of these were signs and symptoms of recognised side-effects, or were due to the injection process and not the vaccine itself.

Unfortunately some national newspapers have made allegations that the vaccine is responsible for a wider range of conditions. With so many HPV vaccines being given in a relatively short time period, it is inevitable that conditions which can naturally occur in adolescents will happen not long after vaccination. The evidence does not suggest that there has been any increase in such conditions following the introduction of Cervarix.

CURRENT POSITION AND FUTURE PLANS

HPV vaccine is routinely offered to girls in school Year 8 (aged 12/13 years), and last year 94.5% of girls in this PCT completed the full course of three vaccinations (one of the highest rates in the country). A catch-up programme to immunise all teenage girls aged between 14 and 18 has recently started, and the media allegations have had a significant impact on parental acceptance of HPV vaccine in this PCT. Comparing the same schools for 2008 and 2009, the percentage uptake among Year 8 girls has fallen by 12.2%. There are marked differences at school level, where uptake of the first dose ranges from 43.8% to 88.6%. As at early November, it appears that up to 1,500 (18%) of 8,500 Year 8, 10 and 11 girls may have been withdrawn from the programme.

The PCT has produced an information sheet which is being sent to parents of girls who have not yet started their course of vaccinations. It also includes the dedicated PCT email address for HPV advice that has been set up to deal with parental queries.

RECOMMENDED: That the Committee receive and note this report