



Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccines as an Option for Preventing Cervical Malignancies: (How) Effective and Safe?

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We carried out a systematic review of HPV vaccine pre- and post-licensure trials to assess the evidence of their effectiveness and safety. We find that HPV vaccine clinical trials design, and data interpretation of both efficacy and safety outcomes, were largely inadequate. Additionally, we note evidence of selective reporting of results from clinical trials (i.e., exclusion of vaccine efficacy figures related to study subgroups in which efficacy might be lower or even negative from peer-reviewed publications). Given this, the widespread optimism regarding HPV vaccines long-term benefits appears to rest on a number of unproven assumptions (or such which are at odd with factual evidence) and significant misinterpretation of available data. For example, the claim that HPV vaccination will result in approximately 70% reduction of cervical cancers is made despite the fact that the clinical trials data have not demonstrated to date that the vaccines have actually prevented a single case of cervical cancer (let alone cervical cancer death), nor that the current overly optimistic surrogate marker-based extrapolations are justified. Likewise, the notion that HPV vaccines have an impressive safety profile is only supported by highly flawed design of safety trials and is contrary to accumulating evidence from vaccine safety surveillance databases and case reports which continue to link HPV vaccination to serious adverse outcomes (including death and permanent disabilities). We thus conclude that further reduction of cervical cancers might be best achieved by optimizing cervical screening (which carries no such risks) and targeting other factors of the disease rather than by the reliance on vaccines with questionable efficacy and safety profiles.

Keywords: Cervarix; Gardasil; HPV vaccines; adverse reactions; cervical cancers; clinical trials; conflict of interests; safety profile; vaccine efficacy; vaccine safety

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