

INCREASING HPV VACCINATION COMPLETION IN WA SCHOOLS: A FORMATIVE STUDY

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Background: In Western Australia (WA), the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine has been offered to girls since 2007, and to boys since 2014 through a school-based vaccination program. In 2014 full dose coverage (3 doses at that date) was 68.0%, 80.4% and 76.1% for Government, Catholic and Independent schools respectively.

Methods: This mixed methods study explored knowledge and attitudes towards HPV and the school-based program along with barriers and enablers. Data were collected via online survey from senior school administrators (n = 63), immunisation and school nurses (n = 51), and via student focus groups (n = 10 groups; n = 70 students) and parent interviews (n = 22) from all three school sectors in WA. Low coverage schools (identified using Health Department data) were specifically targeted. Ethics approval was obtained from Curtin University HREC, Health Department and school sectors.

Results: Survey respondents from schools with low vaccination coverage were more likely to report problems with return of consent forms; low literacy and low health literacy among parents; student absenteeism; difficulty in contacting parents because they've moved; and language other than English as barriers to HPV vaccination. The qualitative study found an overall trust and support for vaccination; however awareness around HPV and the benefits of HPV (and other) vaccinations among students and parents was low. Principals, nurses, students and parents identified strategies to enhance the school-based program.

Conclusion: A multi-faceted approach to increasing HPV vaccination coverage in schools with low coverage, particularly those in areas of social and economic disadvantage is needed. Initiatives to reach students who are regularly absent and those who move schools are needed. Raising awareness of HPV and vaccinations in general is important for all parents and students. Target strategies are required for low literacy parents and for families whose first language is other than English.

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