HPV vaccination for boys has commenced

NSW school boys now have access to the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine which will protect them against developing infections that can lead to cancer.

Boys in Year 7 in all NSW high schools are being offered the HPV vaccine annually. Boys in Year 9 will also be offered the vaccine as part of the national “catch up” program this year and in 2014.

SWS LHD Director Public Health Unit, Dr Stephen Conaty said the highly successful vaccine had already seen a drop in the infections that lead to cervical cancer in females.

“The vaccine, which has been available to girls since 2007, is highly effective in preventing the main types of HPV infection and should be given to adolescents before they become sexually active,” said Dr Conaty said.

“Extending the vaccination program to boys will help protect them against some of the most common types of HPV infection and against developing a range of cancers.”

“As the vaccine only protects against two of several high-risk types of HPV associated with cancer it is vital that women continue to have regular Pap tests,” he said.

Dr Conaty said as well as protecting young men from HPV infections, immunising them would also help protect women from infection.

“The HPV vaccine is a strong defence in preventing this common virus that is easily spread during intimate contact with another person,” he said.

In 2012, 87 per cent of Year 7 girls received at least one dose of HPV vaccine and 79 per cent completed the three dose course in school.

HPV is the name given to a group of viruses that affect both females and males. Most people who are sexually active will have a genital HPV infection at some time in their lives. HPV infection usually causes no symptoms and goes away by itself. However, in rare cases infection can cause life-threatening cancers.

Almost all cases of cervical cancer and genital warts are due to HPV infection. HPV also causes cancers in other parts of the body.

Information kits have been sent to the parents of all NSW schoolboys eligible to receive the vaccine. Students in Year 7 will also be offered vaccination against other diseases, including diphtheria-tetanus-whooping cough (dTpa), hepatitis B and varicella (chicken pox).

For more information please visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation