

**Remarks by the Honourable Dr. Fuad Khan  
Minister of Health  
HPV Educational Campaign Launch**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room, MoH Head Office**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2012 @ 10.00am**

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First I would like to begin by saying that, why are we here today. Why are we doing this launch? You've heard from each member of the head table about the development of the HPV vaccine, what it does, what it cannot do and how good it is and what are its limitations. What I would like to start by saying is first I would like to say thank you very much for everything that has been said, but as minister I must also speak on these matters. Prevention is always better than cure and the Ministry of Health has embarked on a preventative mode of most unhealthy lifestyles, and in this case, its cancer. We are sitting here today ladies and gentlemen in what we could call a public health landmark in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a public health achievement on a worldwide, international basis.

Human papilloma virus types 16 and 18 cause about 70% of cervical cancers. HPV types 6 and 11 cause about 90% of anogenital warts. The HPV vaccine to be introduced targets the HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11 strains. This means that a group of 30% of HPV strains would not be covered by the vaccine. Henceforth it must be remembered that pap smears must be still be done to detect any of the cancers that could still be occurring. So being vaccinated for HPV should not that you stop the pap smears. Pap smears will have to continue because one does not know exactly what or who would be affected with the HPV virus and cancer of the cervix.

Now if anyone has a relative who has suffered from the complications of the cancers of the cervix would understand the need to prevent this disease. Cancer of the cervix is a sexually transmitted disease as we know today. However there are some instances of non-sexual cancer of the cervix but the majority of the cancer of the cervix are sexually transmitted infections and that is how the human papillomavirus enters the cervical lining. There are different stages and different grades, however some people end up with stage 3 cancer in the cervix because of the lack of their use of the pap smears. A lack of doing pap smears. These patients either end up with radical hysterectomies which is a serious surgical procedure. They end up with radiation, chemotherapy and sometimes at the end of the day as you would say, kidney failure due to uretary obstruction which you would just have seen. What this vaccine is doing to do it is giving our young people a chance to prevent that disorder as they go into their later life. If it is missed, if we miss the 11 to 12 age group prior to becoming sexually active, then we decrease their chances of prevention of cancer of the cervix later in life and this is a take home message that

people must understand because the human papillomavirus virus has been seen as a moral, ethical and an economic argument. The moral and ethical argument that is in the international arena is whether we should be giving pre pubescent girls prior to being sexually active, the vaccine. However the benefits more than outweigh the problems that occur with cancer of the cervix. So that negates that argument that we are giving our young children a chance and preventing cancer of the cervix in later life.

The second part of it is the economic part of it, whether it is necessary to spend that amount of money to give our vaccine to our prepubescent girls, economically. The cost of the dosages of the 3 vaccines today cost about 300 to 400 dollars some say US but I understand in Trinidad and Tobago that it is \$185 per dose and you have to give 3 dosages so you calculate it. Now it is an economic decision. However when bought in bulk the Ministry of Health will be able to get it at a reasonable rate. I think it is approximately \$16 US per buyout. I could be corrected.

So we are going to start off with a campaign in Trinidad and Tobago. It is going to start in November and we are going to have 20,000 vaccines to start off with. This campaign is going to go out through the year and we are hoping to immunize most of our young girls initially utilizing our district health visitors and I have been assured there is a system in place to continue that. We are also going to deal with the first year of the secondary schools and vaccinate those children. Our committee nurses I must say are on board because we have what they call an expanded programme of immunization at present. We are going to piggyback on that but this is a voluntary programme. It is not mandatory. However recently I was reading on the internet that the head of the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Europe has mandated that they go out, the European countries go out and vaccinate all prepubescent girls. This is as late as September 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 so the US authorities are indicating it, the European authorities are indicating it and we have heard from Dr. Ytades at PAHO that the vaccine is safe. So we are here to give our young girls a chance at prevention of cancer of the cervix and the complications it may have for life.

This vaccine is also used for anogenital warts and oropharyngeal infections, as well as warts and cancer. It can be given but the dosage, the amount of, the uptake would not be cost effective to do that. It can be used in boys to prevent penile cancers. Once again the cost benefit would not allow it, so what we are starting off is dealing with our young girls and this campaign has started as we have promised two months ago, three months ago that we are going to immunize all of our young girls, prepubescent girls 11 to 12 in Trinidad and Tobago to prevent cancer of the cervix.

I want to thank the corporate communications people for doing these wonderful ads and the brochures because there is going to be more education, education to the parents and guardians so they can sign on and allow their children to be vaccinated within Trinidad and Tobago. Once again I want to commend everybody for being here on this landmark, public health intervention in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much.