Ladies and gentlemen good morning and I take great pleasure in joining you all in the launch of the HPV Vaccination Educational Campaign. Ministry of Health in its commitment to ensure that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago obtain quality healthcare takes, one more stride to prevent the incidence, the prevalence, morbidity and mortality due to cervical cancer. Ministry of Health recognizes the growing threat of cervical cancer among our female population.

Cervical cancer is a growing threat as well as a growing health issue among our female population. Within Trinidad and Tobago, approximately 123 females are diagnosed per annum and 93 females unfortunately die due to cancer of the cervix each year. Research worldwide has provided evidence that HPV is the cause of 90% of cervical cancer cases globally. This sexually transmitted infection is one of the most common STIs and statistics show that 80% of females contract the sexually transmitted infection within their lifetime.

In spite of all these, cervical cancer is the only cancer, which can be prevented, only cancer for which a vaccine is available. The Ministry of Health in a commitment to decrease the rate of cervical cancer in Trinidad and Tobago and in the future years would like to introduce the HPV vaccine in the “Expanded Programme of Immunization”, that is the EPI programme by the end of this year.

The Human papilloma virus that is the HPV has been recognized as a necessary cause of cervical cancer, and the association applies equally to both squamous-cell and adeno-carcinoma and is consistent worldwide. Two of the oncogenic types-16 and 18 are together responsible for 70% of the world’s cervical cancer cases. Selected types of HPV cause cervical cancer, anogenital warts and other anogenital and head and neck cancers. 500,00 cases of cervical cancer and 260,000
women deaths each year in the Latin America and Caribbean counties. Most cases are in the developing countries and it is most in the females who are not screen or who do not receive early treatment.

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 cervical cancer incidence, the rate in Trinidad and Tobago is two times higher than worldwide. A study showed that 35.4% of healthy women age 16 to 65 years were HPV DNA positive in the cervix. A recently concluded study conducted by the University of the West Indies in collaboration with the Ministry of Health revealed that HPV 16 and 18 was the most frequently detected type responsible for 83.8% of the burden. Multiple HPV infections were found in 12% overall in Tobago and in Jamaica it was 34% when compared.

The highest prevalence among women is between 25-34 years. A study in Jamaica also described a 12% prevalence of HPV 45 in women undergoing colposcopy. The age adjusted prevalence of HPV infection was 35% in Tobago and 81% in Jamaica.

The HPV vaccine will be offered as a result of this high incidence to the prepubescent girls between the ages 11 to 12. The vaccination is used as a preventative method that targets HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11 strains, which are responsible for 70% of cervical cancer. This vaccine is not effective against HPV infection from other strains, although it has some element of cross protection and since this is a preventative vaccine not a therapeutic vaccine it is not effective in those who are already infected. Hence, it is envisaged that even though the vaccine would not completely eradicate cervical cancer within our future female population but it would significantly reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

In an attempt to allow for as many girls to get vaccinated as possible, the Ministry of Health has made it our priority to give these vaccines free of charge for the mentioned age group. Also to allow less hassle within the process, the vaccine will be available within primary and secondary schools and will be administered and monitored by trained professionals.

The vaccine has been monitored and tested on an international level and thus is regarded as safe. Assuredly, we will take all the required precautions and steps to ensure utmost safety. Although this vaccine is voluntary, parents are advised to actively participate in the learning process about cervical cancer, HPV and the HPV vaccine. This will allow familiarity with the risks of cervical cancer, the HPV types which can affect the genital area and to allow a personal assurance that the HPV vaccine is safe and right for their child.

It is the Ministry of Health’s primary desire to allow the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to experience a healthier and a more fulfilling life. This has been our minister and ministry’s motto since Dr. Khan had taken office. The HPV vaccine allows for one less concern for the parents of this nation and for their children. The vaccine itself is being facilitated to allow a long, healthy
life of our females within Trinidad and Tobago and to also allow for our females to live a cancer free life where all their ambitions will be met.

Thank you very much