

New vaccine introduction in middle income countries: HPV demand generation and vaccine acceptance strategies

Key takeaways from Linked's workshop held on October 22-23rd, 2024

The Linked Immunisation Action Network welcomed immunisation practitioners from six middle-income countries (MICs) along with global and regional technical experts, for a workshop focused on ***"New Vaccines Introduction in Middle Income Countries: HPV demand generation and vaccine acceptance strategies"***. Held in Istanbul, Turkey, on 22-23 October 2024, the objective of this workshop was to facilitate the sharing of approaches, good practices, and lessons learned to build trust, acceptance, and uptake of the HPV vaccine in communities, with special attention



to religious and cultural contexts in each participating country. Country government teams from Cuba, Kosovo, Mongolia, the Philippines, Tunisia, and Viet Nam participated, along with experts from partner organizations, including Gavi, WHO HQ, PAHO, CHAI, Jhpiego, UNICEF HQ, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, UNICEF country office to Mongolia, and WHO country office to the Philippines and Kosovo. The workshop was organized and facilitated by Curatio International Foundation in partnership with Results for Development. **This brief outlines key learnings and takeaways that arose from the workshop.**

The current introduction status of the HPV vaccine in participating countries ranged across the readiness continuum, bringing a rich and diverse perspective. As of October 2024, the participating countries had the following statuses:

- Viet Nam is planning a phased introduction of the HPV vaccine in 2026, beginning with targeting 12-year-old girls in four provinces through school-based vaccination using a two-dose vaccine
- Tunisia and Cuba are planning to introduce the HPV vaccine in the first quarter of 2025, using a single-dose HPV vaccine, targeting 12-year-old girls (Tunisia) and 9-year-old girls (Cuba) through school-based vaccination
- Mongolia is starting the planning phase for a nationwide rollout in November 2024, using a single-dose HPV vaccine, targeting 11 year-old girls and boys through school-based vaccination
- Kosovo has included the HPV vaccine in its regular vaccination schedule nationwide since February 2024, using a single dose HPV vaccine, targeting 12-year-old girls through school-based vaccination
- The Philippines is in the implementation stage of a nationwide scale-up of the HPV vaccine, using a two-dose HPV vaccine, targeting 9-14 year-old girls through school-based vaccination.

Countries had the opportunity to explore posters created by their peer countries, which summarized their challenges, strategies, and learning objectives. **Three main challenges emerged across the countries:**

- **Addressing rising vaccine hesitancy and misinformation related to the HPV vaccine**, including low community awareness about cervical cancer, low risk perception, fear of side effects, including around fertility, cultural sensitivities related to sexual and reproductive health, perception of the HPV vaccine as a new vaccine, leading to delayed decision due to fear of the unknown
- **Defining and implementing demand generation strategies**, in particular addressing anti-vaccine narratives through tailored communication strategies and increasing coverage for vulnerable groups through behavior change interventions, healthcare worker trainings, and parent engagement.
- **Navigating supply of the HPV vaccine as well as choosing the vaccine product (one or two doses)**, the current uncertainty in supply availability impacts demand and acceptance of the vaccine due to delayed introductions of the one-dose vaccine, leading to communication campaigns to explain the switch from 2-3 doses to one dose and/or a delayed introduction of the HPV vaccine all together.

This workshop presented a unique opportunity for participating countries to engage in cross-regional collaborative learning. Using interactive peer-to-peer discussion, experience sharing and collaborative problem solving, countries brainstormed priority strategies to address the three main challenges listed above. After a technical presentation on global good practices related to demand promotion, countries learned from Kosovo's experience using formative research to uncover barriers to HPV vaccine acceptance and develop tailored strategies. Countries also learned from Guyana on leveraging social media to address vaccine hesitancy and from the Philippines on the implementation and success factors of demand promotion activities.



Distilling from these rich discussions, **five key takeaways emerged from the workshop:**

1. **Choosing or switching to a single dose vaccination can increase vaccine acceptance while also lowering costs and simplifying delivery.** Since December 2022, WHO has recommended introducing either a one-dose or a two-dose vaccination schedule, as trials with data on single-dose vaccination show that single-dose HPV vaccination is highly efficacious (< 95%) over 3 years. Single-dose policy can address vaccine hesitancy issues and thus increase vaccine uptake, and more specifically, single-dose affords HPV vaccination expansion for boys, thus eliminating stigmatization of girls in some settings or reducing misconception that only girls are targeted with mal intent.
2. **Conducting formative research is critical to effectively promote HPV vaccination.** Conducting research at least 6 months before introduction and periodically thereafter provides community insights about the knowledge and beliefs about HPV, cervical cancer, and the vaccine.
3. **Insights gained from research can be used to tailor effective demand generation strategies.** Campaigns may include collaborating with girls and parents to create messages focused on cancer prevention; utilizing media channels, social networks, and influencers to reach target populations; and employing behavioral science techniques

such as SMS reminders for parents and game-based learning platforms like "Immune Patrol" to increase children's knowledge of infectious diseases and vaccination.

4. **Communication campaigns and demand generation strategies should be embedded in the planning phase, not after introduction.** Many countries plan for communications activities to begin before introduction activities: some countries aim to start their communication campaigns five months before rollout. A good practice is to engage parents and teachers before the vaccine is introduced as a way to minimize vaccine hesitancy. Finally, countries discussed how choosing an opt-out process, whereby parents can decide to exempt their child out of the vaccine, was more successful than an opt-in consent form where parents are automatically asked to choose whether their child should get the vaccine.
5. **Regular monitoring of both online (media and social media) and offline information (gathered from social mobilizers and healthcare workers) for misinformation provides understanding of the root causes of vaccine hesitancy and enables interventions to be tailored accordingly.** Countries learned about two strategies to combat misinformation:
 - o Providing **healthcare workers** with comprehensive training on the benefits of HPV vaccination and equipping them with effective communication strategies to address questions and concerns from the community.
 - o **Establishing regular communication channels with journalists, healthcare workers, and teachers** to proactively share information about potential adverse events following immunisation and providing them with evidence-based resources and talking points to effectively respond to rumors and questions, ensuring accurate information dissemination.

To further equip country participants with effective tools and approaches, countries heard from global partners (WHO, UNICEF, PAHO, CHAI, Jhpiego) on their tailored support for HPV introduction and demand promotion activities, including guides for planning and designing demand promotion interventions and communication and advocacy activities (see list of tools and links below).

As a final exercise, each country delegation developed a plan to adapt and implement demand generation learnings from the workshop in their countries to support the introduction and scale-up of the HPV vaccine. These plans were shared and reviewed by their peers to allow for questions, feedback, and suggestions between countries. This peer-to-peer review facilitated the sharing of additional lessons and good practices, notably on which demand promotion strategy to use and adapt to each country context.



Progress on the implementation of these plans will be shared as part of upcoming virtual engagements in early 2025. Country-level partners actively contributed to the discussions and will play a critical role in supporting each delegation make progress on their plan after the workshop.

We are very grateful for the active engagement from our country and partner participants, presenters, and facilitators. For those of you who did not attend the meeting, the presentations and session recordings can be found [here](#) on our website. If you are interested in learning more about a specific theme or country experience discussed during this workshop, please let Linked Network Facilitators know by reaching out to community@linkedimmunisation.org.

HPV introduction and scale-up: demand promotion tools and guidance documents

Global partner	Tools, guidance and useful resources online
<p>WHO</p>	<p><i>HPV vaccine specific resources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HPV Communications: Special considerations for a unique vaccine (2016) • Communicating with caregivers about HPV vaccination (2023) • Behavioural and Social Drivers (BeSD) of vaccination: tools and practical guidance for achieving high uptake of HPV vaccine (coming soon) <p><i>General vaccine introduction resources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccine crisis communication manual: step-by-step guidance for national immunisation programmes • A field guide to qualitative research for new vaccine introduction: step-by-step instructions to help immunisation programmes understand their target audiences before communicating about the introduction of a new vaccine • Immune patrol – school educational package • TIP: tailoring immunisation programmes • Immunisation Agenda 2030 Report
<p>UNICEF</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guide for planning and designing demand promotion interventions • Global HPV communication • Internet of good things • U-Report • FunDoo
<p>UNICEF ECARO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide for healthworkers to strengthen HPV vaccine confidence • 3 Steps for a safe and timely immunisation • <i>Find answers on the AIDA chatbot about the HPV vaccine:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Click here to chat with AIDA on Telegram ○ Click here to chat with AIDA on WhatsApp • Interpersonal communication for immunisation: Training for healthworkers • Strengthening confidence in vaccines, demand for immunisation and addressing vaccine hesitancy: Considerations for frontline Health Workers • Interpersonal communication training on immunisation: a monitoring and evaluation guidance for implementers and line managers • <i>Proactive reach-out calls for vaccination: Tools for healthcare workers and decision makers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A five-step approach for healthworkers to increase childhood vaccination through proactive reach-out calls ○ Implementation guide for decision-makers to deploy the five-step approach in their health facilities
<p>Jhpiego</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.jsi.com/resource/hpv-vaccine-acceleration-program-partners-initiative-happi-project-factsheet/ • https://www.jhpiego.org/our-expertise/immunisation/

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.jhpiego.org/resources/ • https://www.jhpiego.org/countries-we-support/philippines/ • HPV vaccination Brochure for Teenage girls • https://www.jhpiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Jhpiego-Operational-Guidance-for-Continuity-of-Essential-Services-Final.pdf
CHAI	<p><u>Technet HPV resources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country and partner resources on vaccine acceptance and demand generation • Learnings from introductions & coverage improvement • CHAI-specific materials from Indonesia and Nigeria – <i>forthcoming</i>
PAHO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diseases Elimination Initiative - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization • Cervical Cancer - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization • 60a82278b5257e63c783bebe6.pdf (paho.org) • https://www.paho.org/en/topics/immunisation/immunisation-toolkit/behavioral-science-vaccine-demand-and-confidence- • Immunisation Toolkit - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization • Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization • Infographic: One dose of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is safe and effective against cervical cancer! - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization • Infographic: 5 reasons to vaccinate girls against human papillomavirus (HPV) - PAHO/WHO Pan American Health Organization
Linked Immunisation Action Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked Workshop: New vaccine introduction in Middle Income Countries: HPV Demand generation and vaccine acceptance strategies • Linked Webinar: One-dose HPV vaccination: Evidence, lessons learned and implementation strategies, with experiences from Guyana and Estonia • Gavi-Linked Learning Forum: Sharing lessons and experiences in decision-making and implementation for new vaccine introduction among lower middle-income countries • Linked Workshop: New Vaccine Introduction in Middle Income Countries – Overcoming Barriers to Introduce and Scale the HPV Vaccine