

Formative research as a basis for communication strategy: experience from Kosovo

Linked HPV vaccine workshop, October 22–23rd 2024, Istanbul

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Context: HPV vaccine hesitancy in Kosovo

NIPHK in cooperation with WHO developed: *HPV Vaccine Introduction Insights Research Findings, 2023*

- **Health care professionals:**
 - Reported the need for additional information on HPV vaccine and how to communicate with hesitant groups
- **Parents:**
 - Most parents have not heard of HPV vaccine and could be skeptical of a vaccine seen as 'new';
 - Some parents want more detailed information about vaccines
 - Parents are concerned about vaccines' effect on girls' future fertility

Context: HPV vaccine hesitancy in Kosovo

- **School staff:**

- Post-pandemic, many might be hesitant of any obligatory vaccine seen as new
- Some teachers might not feel it is their professional responsibility or role to provide information on vaccination

- **Civil Society Groups:**

- Vulnerable populations might also be concerned about potential effects on girls' future fertility
- Challenge: part of girls from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are out of school
- Low awareness on HPV

Approach: conducting formative research as a basis for communication strategy

NIPH developed Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization (ACSM) Action Plan for HPV vaccine, which was endorsed by MoH

Specific objective:

- Planning and coordination
- Development of information and communication materials
- Communication for health sector
- Communication for teachers and parents
- Communication with media (traditional and social media)
- Communication for vulnerable populations

MoH establishment national multi-sectorial working group for monitoring implementation of ACSM Action Plan.

- NIPH, MoH, MESTI, PHC, with participation of WHO and UNICEF

Approach: conducting formative research as a basis for communication strategy

Evaluation: insights on developing and delivering the HPV vaccine introduction
Communication and Intervention plan, September 2024

- **Healthcare workers** feel well-equipped for communication about vaccination. Would like from time to time some refresher training on communicating with hesitant parents
- **Teachers** felt unprepared to answer parents questions. Requested clear information on whether they need parental consent for HPV vaccination
- **Parents** preferred direct communication with healthcare workers about the HPV vaccine. Suggested that children are also communicated about vaccines to reduce fear of vaccines
- **Journalists** appreciated NIPH's transparency and briefing meeting on the introduction of HPV vaccine. Suggested more media appearances by healthcare workers

Findings of this research will inform the second phase of ACSM Plan implementation

Challenges & Lessons learned

Challenges:

- Limited human resources for health promotion at local level
- Hesitancy due to online misinformation. Parents are skeptical of a vaccine seen as 'new'
- In isolated cases, the implemented strategy for introduction of HPV vaccine was not in line with Communication and Demand Promotion Plan

Good Practices:

- *Inclusion of HPV vaccine in the regular vaccination schedule*
- *Implementation of HPV vaccine together with two other vaccines (bOPV and dT) for target population of girls age 12 years*
- *Preparation started 2 years before:*
 - *Action Plan on Immunization/Introduction of three new vaccines;*
 - *Securing vaccines on time and distribution at all vaccination points;*
 - *Cold-chain capacity secured at central and local level;*
 - *Communication and Demand Promotion Plan;*
 - *Training of HCW for communication with the public, including parents, media).*
 - *Influencers were healthcare professionals*