

Parents claim they weren't told about the dangers

Concerns over cervical cancer jab side-effects

HUNDREDS of schoolgirls have experienced adverse reactions to the new cervical cancer jab.

A health watchdog has admitted 1,001 suspected side-effects have been reported since the Gardasil vaccine was introduced into UK schools six months ago.

They include cases of girls aged just 12 and 13 suffering seizures, breathing difficulties, joint pains, fatigue and stomach problems.

Parents claim they weren't warned about the potential dangers of the jab while campaigners have also expressed concern.

However, the authorities insist the vaccine is safe and that the proportion of adverse reaction reports is to be expected.

Jackie Fletcher, of the vaccine support group Jabs, said: "We are not happy with the lack of information given to parents about the safety of this vaccine.

"It does not allow them to make an informed choice."

The vaccination has been offered to girls to protect against human papillomavirus, which causes most cases of cervical cancer, since 2008.

The drug Cervarix was chosen for the first phase of the NHS programme because it offered "best overall value".

More than five million doses were given.

By Janet Boyle

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However, concerns were raised after the vaccine was linked to several cases of girls displaying severe side-effects.

In August Cervarix was replaced by Gardasil. But we can reveal this drug, too, has been connected to girls falling seriously ill.

Sherrel Halliday, from Cawdor, whose eldest daughter Deborah, 15, suffered exhaustion and painful joints after being vaccinated with Cervarix, said: "We've been asked to have our younger daughter, Katherine, 13, vaccinated with Gardasil.

"We were not told of any serious side-effects by the school, even after I asked how safe the vaccine was.

"In fact the school's information leaflet bears no resemblance to the side-effects listed by its makers, which includes temporary soreness, swelling, headaches, nausea and high temperature.

"It is too much to ask for honesty?"

Sherrel says Deborah could barely walk for weeks after the jab. And she is worried Katherine will suffer side-effects from Gardasil.

"I've been contacted by other parents whose daughters experienced similar adverse reactions from Gardasil," she said.

Sherrel believes the adverse reaction stats are just the tip of an iceberg.

"Most parents don't know to report side-effects to the MHRA or ask their doctor or practice nurse to do so," she added.

An MHRA spokesman said: "Gardasil is a scientifically-proven vaccine that has been extensively used in other countries, with tens of millions vaccinated."

Robert Marsh, CEO of cervical cancer charity The Eve Appeal said: "There have been reports of unpleasant side-effects from Gardasil and we sympathise with those concerned.

"However, HPV vaccinations are estimated to save up to 400 lives a year in the UK."

A spokesman for the Scottish Government said: "The benefits of HPV vaccination in protecting against cervical cancer outweigh the risks.

"Vaccines and all medicines carry a small risk of known side-effects and healthcare professionals, parents and carers are encouraged to report any suspected adverse reactions using the MHRA yellow card reporting scheme."

■ Deborah (right) became seriously ill after the cancer jab.



CASE STUDY

DEBORAH HALLIDAY, 15, is in her fourth year at Nairn Academy. She's working to get the grades for college or university. But her first love is sport.

"Before getting the cancer vaccine I played badminton, judo, basketball and went roller-skating with friends," she said.

"Now I'm exhausted after 10 minutes in the swimming pool and have to watch friends on the ice-rink because it's too painful to skate."

Deborah was vaccinated in September 2010 and by Christmas she struggled to walk even with a stick.

"She was referred to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness and advised by the paediatrician not to complete the three vaccine course," mum Sherrel said.

"She was obviously suffering serious side-effects."

She still receives physiotherapy for muscle damage.