



Breaking News: Japan Suspends Recommendation of HPV Vaccines

By Norma Erickson

14 June 2013: Merck's Gardasil and GlaxoSmithKline's Cervarix took a hit as Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare told local governments to suspend their previous recommendation for HPV vaccine administration to the country's 12 to 16 year old girls.

Mrs. Tomoko Saito, reporter for *The Asahi Shimbun*, emailed [this front page news article](#) to the SaneVax team the same day. According to the article, [Health Ministry withdraws recommendation for cervical cancer vaccine](#):

“Girls can still receive the vaccination for free, although medical institutions must now inform them beforehand that the ministry does not recommend it.”

The Japanese government has subsidized the use of either Gardasil or Cervarix since 2010, but the HPV vaccines marketed to prevent cervical cancer did not come into widespread use until after revisions to Japan's Preventive Vaccination Law took effect in April 2013. These changes also added pneumococcal vaccines and Japanese encephalitis vaccines to the country's recommended schedule.



Side effect reports for each of the four newly approved vaccines are as follows:

- Cervarix - 245.1 per 1 million vaccinations
- Gardasil - 155.7 per 1 million vaccinations
- Pneumococcal vaccines - 89.1 per million vaccinations
- Japanese encephalitis vaccines - 67.4 per million vaccinations

After a special task force examined 43 cases of widespread pain after HPV vaccinations, the panel concluded that given the timing of symptoms they could not rule out a connection between the adverse events and HPV vaccines.

Because a direct cause and effect relationship could neither be established, nor ruled out, the task force concluded that their previous recommendation for administration of HPV vaccines should be withdrawn until appropriate information about the cause of the pain and numbness experienced by the girls can be determined and provided to the public.

Mariko Momoi, vice president of the International University of Health and Welfare and chairperson of the special task force stated:

“It is necessary to gather information immediately to accurately grasp how often (these side effects) are occurring.”

The task force concluded that:

“...active recommendation of cervical cancer vaccinations should thus be halted until a more complete picture of their side effects can be attained.”

This is the second time in the history of Japan's vaccination program that a vaccine recommendation has been rescinded.

Mika Matsufuji's daughter was vaccinated with Cervarix in 2011 and subsequently lost her ability to walk. She is now confined to a wheelchair. Mika represents an association of cervical cancer vaccination victims' parents. Although this group wants to see HPV vaccinations halted, they see the health panel's decision as a step in the right direction. Mrs. Matsufuji stated:

“We welcome the decision not to recommend the vaccination even though it is a small step. Parents can decide whether their children should receive the vaccination or not.”

The Sane Vax team would like to thank the health authorities in Japan for acting quickly and responsibly when a concern about HPV vaccine safety came to light. Health authorities around the globe could learn something from Japan's demonstration of genuine concern for the health and well-being of their citizens.

References:

1. [Health ministry withdraws recommendation for cervical cancer vaccine](#), *The Asahi Shimbun*
2. [Gov't cautions municipalities on cervical cancer vaccination](#), *Kyodo News International*
3. [Cervix vaccine issues trigger health notice](#), *The Japan Times*