Vaccine for Cervical Cancer

Why in news?

The Union Government is going to roll out Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines for prevention of cervical cancer to girls between the age of 9 and 14 years through schools.

What is cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is preventable and curable if it is detected early and managed effectively.
- It is the second most common cancer in women in India, and the cause of a large number of deaths annually.
- It is caused by infection with the HPC, and there are vaccines to protect against cancerous HPV.
- To know more about Cervical Cancer, click here.

How prevalent is cervical cancer?

- A recent study in the Lancet shows that India accounts for the highest number of cervical cancer cases in Asia, followed by China.
- More than 58% of all cervical cancer cases and deaths globally were estimated in Asia. India accounts for 21% of cases and 23% of deaths.
- **Incidence rate** - Globally, in 2020, the incidence rate of cervical cancer cases is 13.3 new cases per 1,00,000 women a year.
- In India, the incidence rate is 18 per 1,00,000 women.

What is the targeted incidence rate?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has specified that countries must reach and maintain an incidence rate of fewer than 4 new cases per 1,00,000 women a year by 2030.
- To achieve that goal, 90% of girls will have to be vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by the age of 15.

When will the HPV vaccine be rolled out?

- The indigenous HPV vaccine CERVAVAC will be rolled out by mid-2023.
- It has got the approval of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).
- The vaccine was cleared by the government advisory panel, National Technical Advisory Group for Immunisation (NTAGI) for use in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

The Universal Immunisation Programme is one of the largest public health programmes which offers free vaccines for at least 12 diseases.

- A one-time catch-up vaccine will be given to 9-14 year old adolescent girls, before it is introduced at nine years.
- States and Union Territories have been asked to issue directives to appropriate authorities for
    1. organising HPV vaccination centres in schools, and
    2. identifying a nodal person in each government and private school to facilitate the vaccination after collating the number of 9-14 year olds in the schools.
- The government has said that girls who don't attend schools will be given the vaccines by **community outreach** and **mobile health teams**.
- Apart from vaccination, screening programmes are to be conducted regularly to detect early signs of the disease that will allow time for treatment.

A WHO paper in 2021 said fewer than 1 in 10 women had been screened for cervical cancer in the last five years.

What lies ahead?

- According to a recent study, the incidence of cervical cancer inclined with a clear gradient of increasing rates for countries with lower levels of human development.

In 2022, India ranked 132 out of 191 countries on the Human Development Index.

- Once the vaccine is launched through the UIP, steps should be taken to reach the maximum number of the targeted population.
- According to the Lancet study, the surveillance systems and infrastructure used for COVID-19 vaccinations may be customised to
    - improve HPV vaccination,
    - monitor national cervical screening programmes and
    - improve health system capacity to deliver more efficient preventive services.

Reference

The Hindu Explainer | How is India trying to beat cervical cancer?

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