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To: Parents of children in 6th class

By Email Only

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### **Vaccines for children in 1<sup>st</sup> Year**

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This letter is to share information about the vaccines your children will be offered when they are in second level school next year.

Children in 1st year of second level schools are offered:

- HPV vaccine
- Tdap vaccine and
- MenACWY vaccine

These vaccines protect them against harmful diseases.

We have developed a leaflet called “Vaccines to protect your child HPV, MenACWY and Tdap” which contains information about the vaccines available to your child when they are in 1st year of second level school this September. We encourage you to read the information in this leaflet which is attached to this letter.

The vaccines will be provided by HSE school vaccination teams during a visit to your child’s school. Your child will bring home a consent pack in their school bag when they are in 1st year and we would encourage you to look out for that pack, read the information provided and complete the consent form for your child and send it back to their school in the envelope provided.

If you have any questions about the HSE school vaccination programme or vaccines for your child we encourage you to visit our website [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) or to speak to a trusted health professional.

Yours sincerely,

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# Vaccines to protect your child

## HPV, MenACWY and Tdap

Information for parents of children starting secondary school



There are three vaccines offered to protect your child from infectious diseases:

- **HPV vaccine** which protects against the HPV virus which can cause cancer and genital warts
- **Meningococcal ACWY vaccine** which protects against meningitis (inflammation of the lining around the brain) and/or septicaemia (blood poisoning) caused by 4 different types of meningococcal disease
- **Tdap vaccine** which protects against:
  - tetanus (tetanus toxin can cause painful muscle spasms and convulsions)
  - diphtheria (bacteria that can cause a sore throat and severe breathing difficulties) and
  - pertussis (also known as whooping cough)

HPV:  
Protects  
against  
cancer

MenACWY:  
Protects against  
meningitis

Tdap:  
protects against  
tetanus,  
diphtheria and  
whooping  
cough

The next section gives information about each of these vaccines and the viruses and bacteria they protect against.





## HPV Vaccines

### What is HPV?

HPV stands for 'human papillomavirus', which is a group of more than 100 viruses. HPV causes 99% of cervical cancer. The HPV virus is very common, and you can catch it by being sexually active with another person who already has the virus. Infection is very common in both women and men with more than 80% of people will get a HPV infection in their lifetime. Most HPV infections do not need treatment. However, in some people, HPV infection can persist and cause cancer. HPV infection causes 1 in 20 cancers worldwide. HPV also causes genital warts.

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommends that all children aged 12 -13 years should receive the HPV vaccine in the school vaccination programme so that they are protected from cancers caused by HPV when they are adults.

More than 165 countries now have an HPV vaccine programme, with more than 85 of these countries giving the vaccine to **boys and girls**. These countries include the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand.

### As well as cervical cancer, what other cancers can HPV cause?

NIAC say there is a link between HPV infection and cervical, vaginal and vulvar cancer in women and head and neck (back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils) cancers and anal cancer in both men and women and penile cancer in men. Also, the HPV virus causes a range of pre-cancerous lesions – abnormal cells – in both men and women.

The HPV virus causes:

- 99% of cervical cancers
- 9 out of 10 HPV-related anal cancers
- 7 out of 10 vaginal cancers
- 5 out of 10 vulval cancers

HPV vaccine is given in more than 165 countries to prevent cancers

HPV causes 1 in 20 cancers worldwide

## How many doses of the HPV vaccine will my child need?

NIAC recommend that only one dose of HPV vaccine is needed for most people through the school vaccination programme.

For people who have a significantly weak immune system 3 doses of HPV vaccine are recommended. This needs to be discussed with your child's specialist.

Over 590,000 students in Ireland and 100 million people worldwide have received HPV vaccine



### MenACWY Vaccine

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness which can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining around the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning) and can lead to death.

The onset of meningococcal disease can be very sudden.

The symptoms include fever, stiff neck, headache, joint pains, and a rash.

Meningococcal disease can occur at any age, but the highest rate of disease occurs in children under 5 years of age, especially children under 1 year old. The next high-risk group are young people aged 15-19 years.

## Why should my child get the MenACWY meningococcal vaccine now?

All children were offered a meningococcal group C vaccine when they were babies. However, immunity to meningococcal disease reduces over time, so a **booster dose** is recommended now to provide additional protection. The Meningococcal ACWY vaccine will boost your child's protection against group C meningococcal disease, and will provide additional protection against meningococcal groups A, W and Y which also cause meningitis.



## Tdap Vaccine

### What is Tdap?

Tdap stands for tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough).

**Tetanus** can cause generalised painful muscle spasms leading to difficulty breathing and death.

**Diphtheria** is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly develop to cause breathing problems. It can also damage the heart and nervous system.

**Whooping cough (pertussis)** is a disease that can cause long periods of coughing and choking that can make it hard to breathe.

All of these infections are serious diseases that could lead to a hospital admission for your child. At worst, these conditions can cause death.

5 doses  
will  
complete  
your course

### How many doses of Tdap vaccine does my child need?

**All children** were offered vaccines against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough when they were babies, and again in Junior Infants. Immunity to diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough reduces over time, so a **booster dose** is recommended now to provide additional protection.

Up to now, your child should have received four doses of a tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough vaccine – that is:

- 3 doses as a baby
- a booster dose when they were in Junior Infants

This is their fifth and final dose and will give them long lasting protection.

### General questions you might have...

#### Are vaccines safe?

Yes. All vaccines are safe and have been proven to save lives and prevent serious illness. Vaccines are strictly monitored and reviewed regularly by international bodies including:

- the World Health Organization
- the European Medicines Agency

All international bodies have continually reported that the vaccines used in Ireland are safe with no known long-term side effects.

## Do the vaccines have side effects?

Most students have no problems after vaccines.

It is common, though, for some students to have an area of soreness, swelling and redness of the arm where the injection was given. This is nothing to worry about and usually passes after a day or two.

Some students may get a headache, feel sick in their tummy or run a slight temperature. If this happens, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Occasionally, some students may feel unwell and faint after getting their injection. To prevent this, the team will advise students to sit down and rest for 15 minutes after their vaccinations.

Severe allergic reactions to vaccines **are** very rare, and the school vaccination teams are trained to treat any severe allergic reaction.

## Where can I find additional information?

Visit **[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)** for a wide range of information, including videos and factsheets about the vaccines.

You can also find links to the patient information leaflets for the vaccines used in the programme at **[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)**

If you have any further questions, please talk to a member of your HSE school immunisation team. Details are available at the HSE Local Immunisation webpage: **[www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/contact-a-local-immunisation-officer-lio/](http://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/contact-a-local-immunisation-officer-lio/)**

## What happens next?

When your child starts secondary school, they will get a detailed information pack and a consent form. You need to **sign the consent form** and return it to the school to ensure your child receives the vaccines.

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