

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
26 October 2022

PE1939: Amend the date of birth to allow
wider accessibility to the HPV vaccination
programme for boys

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Suzanne Thornton
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to demonstrate a commitment to health equality for young males born between 01/09/1997 and 01/09/2006 by allowing them to access the HPV vaccination via the NHS
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1939

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 20 June 2022
2. The petition seeks to extend accessibility to the HPV vaccine for young males currently aged between 16 and 25 years, who have not been included in the national HPV vaccination programme. The petitioner is concerned that the eligibility criteria for the rollout in Scotland appears to differ from that in England, and questions why young males are not being offered the same protection, by way of vaccination, as females or men who have sex with men. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 35 signatures have been received.

5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1939: Amend the date of birth to allow wider accessibility to the HPV vaccination programme for boys

Petitioner

Suzanne Thornton

Date Lodged:

20 June 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to demonstrate a commitment to health equality for young males born between 01/09/1997 and 01/09/2006 by allowing them to access the HPV vaccination via the NHS.

Previous action

I have written to my MSP.

I have also contacted NHS Child Health Service.

Background information

I'm concerned about this health inequality as all girls are vaccinated, also men who have sex with men (MSM) up to and including the age of 45 in Scotland.

Looking at the process in England the age was raised to any boy 12 or 13 in July 2018, as this would afford greater herd immunity which would, in turn protect older boys.

Young males living south of the border, in addition to females and MSM young people are afforded protection by way of the vaccine, yet the same level of opportunity is not available for young males in Scotland. This is unfair and doesn't demonstrate equity to this service in Scotland.

My family members missed being included in the school vaccination scheme as they were born prior to September 2006.

I have made enquiries with the Child Health Immunisation service and have been advised they will not be eligible for this vaccine due to their

date of birth. They advised doing this privately. Looking at private care it would cost approximately £500 per male to vaccinate them. A prohibitive cost to most families.

Please support this petition.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1939: [Amend the date of birth to allow wider accessibility to the HPV vaccination programme for boys](#), lodged by Suzanne Thornton

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to demonstrate a commitment to health equality for young males born between 1 September 1997 and 1 September 2006 by allowing them to access the HPV vaccination via the NHS.

HPV infection

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is the name for a group of viruses that affect the skin and moist membranes lining the body, such as the cervix, anus, mouth and throat.

HPV is spread by direct physical contact. Anyone who is sexually active is at risk and the risk increases with the number of sexual partners. However, HPV can be transmitted through any physical contact, [such as kissing](#), and not just genital contact or sexual intercourse.

[HPV infections are very common and over 225 types of HPV have been identified, 40 of these infect the genital area](#). Most adults will have been infected at some point in their lives. Incidence of infection increases from the age of 14yrs.

HPV types

HPV types can be characterised into high and low risk types based on their ability to cause cancer. HPV infection is often without symptoms and usually resolves without treatment – 90% of types do so within two

years with no apparent disease. Infection with low risk types of HPV can lead to warts on the skin and genital areas. Persistent infection with high risk types can cause cell changes that can eventually lead to cancer. There are 13 high risk types of HPV that have been associated with cancers such as:

- cancer of the cervix, vulva or vagina in women
- cancer of the penis in men
- some cancers of the head, neck, throat or anus in either sex.

The most common HPV induced cancer is cervical cancer, with HPV 16 and 18 responsible for 70% of cervical cancers worldwide, and 80% of cervical cancers within Scotland. The remaining 20% to 30% of cervical cancers are caused by the other high-risk HPV types.

Public information on HPV is available on the [NHS Inform website](#).

HPV vaccination

A vaccine can be used to help prevent HPV infection. This is usually given as two or three injections over several months.

The [GARDASIL](#) vaccine is routinely used in Scotland. The ingredients of the HPV vaccine are outlined in this [patient information leaflet](#).

HPV vaccination eligibility

HPV vaccination is recommended for all girls and boys between 11 and 14 years of age.

Since 1 September 2008, the vaccination for HPV (types 16 and 18) has been offered to secondary school girls in S1 in Scotland. [Ninety two point four per cent were fully vaccinated in 2008–09](#).

The HPV vaccine has been offered to adolescent boys in S1 from the 2019-20 school year; [uptake among those offered the first dose was 78.7%](#).

There are no exact published dates for vaccine eligibility in Scotland, but in England, [eligibility for the vaccine includes females born after 1 September 1991 and males born after 1 September 2006](#). For Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland dates of birth for eligible cohorts may vary due to the different ages at which the HPV vaccine is first offered.

This age group is offered the vaccine because they are less likely to be sexually active or have already been exposed to HPV. Vaccination

cannot treat or get rid of HPV infection if an individual has already been exposed.

The HPV vaccine is licensed to be given any time from age nine upwards. However, vaccination of girls and boys of this age is not covered by the national HPV vaccination programme. It's normally delivered in the immunisation programme from S1 at secondary school. The vaccine is offered in two or three doses over a period of 12 months, depending on age when an individual received the first dose. The first dose is offered to all pupils in S1 at secondary school. The second dose is usually offered in S2.

[Immunisation against Infectious Disease \('The Green Book'\)](#) sets out that males and females eligible for the vaccine remain eligible until their 25th birthday. This only applies to:

- females under 25 who would have been eligible under routine, and catch up programmes, introduced in 2008
- those boys who become eligible from the academic year 2019-20.

This means that some men under the age of 25 aren't eligible, whereas all females under 25 are eligible. This petition is calling for health equity between boys and girls, asking for boys born between 01/09/1997 and 01/09/2006 to be able to access a 'catch up' HPV vaccination through the NHS.

Additional eligibility criteria

The HPV vaccine is also offered to [men who have sex with men \(MSM\)](#) up to and including 45 years old attending sexual health and HIV clinics across Scotland. This is because MSM attending sexual health and HIV clinics are known to have a higher risk of HPV infection.

Other people may have the vaccine because they have higher risks from HPV infection. For example, if an individual has HIV they are more likely to get HPV infection, which means those individuals have a higher risk of developing HPV-related cancer.

The Scottish Government's Chief Medical Officer's letter provides information on key elements of the [HPV immunisation programme](#).

Scottish Government vaccination advice

Vaccination policy in Scotland, in line with the rest of the UK, is based on recommendations from the [Joint Committee on Vaccination and](#)

[Immunisation \(JCVI\)](#). Scottish Ministers are not bound by JCVI recommendations but, to date, have never diverged from them.

The JCVI is an expert group which considers a wide range of evidence to inform advice on all aspects of vaccination. Following the JCVI's recommendation, Scottish Ministers approved the HPV programme for girls in 2008.

[The JCVI note that the consideration of HPV vaccination in boys is a complex issue and taking into wider issues of health economic methodology, prevalence rates and equality issues](#). Boys were not initially covered in the recommendations for the vaccination programme as it was concluded at that time that:

- it would not be a cost-effective use of health service resources
- high coverage in girls would provide herd protection to boys
- vaccination of boys would generate little additional benefit to the prevention of cervical cancer, which is the most common HPV induced cancer and the main aim of the vaccination programme.

The JCVI has been reviewing the evidence for vaccinating boys since 2013, particularly in relation to the efficacy of the vaccination in preventing non-cervical cancers. In 2018, [the JCVI concluded](#):

“It is predicted that by vaccinating boys as well as girls, additional cases of HPV attributable cervical and non-cervical cancer will be prevented in women and additional cases of HPV attributable non-cervical cancer will be prevented in males especially in men who have sex with men (MSM).”

It further noted [a gender-neutral programme would also provide resilience against short-term fluctuations in uptake](#). Following the JCVI's recommendation, Scottish Ministers approved the HPV programme to include adolescent boys offering the vaccine to all S1 boys from the 2019-20 school year.

The JCVI has not recommended that older boys be offered the vaccine. [This is reported](#) to be due to the rationale that evidence suggests it is not needed as they are already benefitting greatly from the indirect protection, known as herd protection, that has built up from 10 years of the girls' HPV vaccination programme.

To find out more about the JCVI recommendations (Published 18 July 2018) visit [JCVI statement: extending the HPV vaccination programme – conclusions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Immunisation coverage rates

Public Health Scotland provides an annual update on HPV immunisation coverage rates. Coverage rates are reported for males and females in their first and second year of secondary school (S1 and S2), and for females in their third and fourth year of secondary school (S3 and S4). [The latest update was published in December 2021.](#)

Vaccination rates have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; this was the second consecutive year when the HPV immunisation programme in Scotland was not fully completed during the school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures. NHS Boards are running catch-up programmes for any pupils not offered the vaccine during this time.

Impact of vaccination

[Research published in the British Medical Journal](#) suggests vaccination of girls aged 12-13 years with the HPV vaccine in Scotland has led to a dramatic reduction in cervical disease and shows evidence of herd immunity in unvaccinated women. It notes this is consistent with the reduced prevalence of high-risk HPV in Scotland.

Other relevant petitions and reports

Relevant petitions have been considered by the Scottish Parliament including:

- [PE01477: Gender neutral Human Papillomavirus vaccination](#)
- [PE01574: HPV Vaccine Safety](#)

Susan Brown

SPICe Researcher, Health and Social Care

[03/08/2022]

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 17 June 2022

PE1939/A: Amend the date of birth to allow wider accessibility to the HPV vaccination programme for boys

The Scottish Government position is clear, it is important that vaccines are given on time to protect people from vaccine-preventable diseases. It is important that people receive their immunisations at the right age to ensure maximum protection – from the first immunisation appointment, scheduled at two months of age, continuing through the teenage years and throughout adulthood.

Currently, vaccination policy in Scotland, as with the rest of the UK, is informed by recommendations from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI is an expert group which considers a full range of available evidence before providing advice on all aspects of vaccination, including eligibility, to each of the four UK health departments.

In line with the advice of the JCVI, the HPV vaccine has been offered to girls in S1 since 2008 and from 2019 it was agreed that this would be extended to include boys.

From 1 August 2019, the HPV immunisation programme in Scotland was extended to adolescent boys, with the vaccine offered to every pupil in their first year of secondary school (S1). The school-based HPV immunisation programme aims to help protect both boys and girls from developing HPV-related cancers later in life. The most common HPV-induced cancer is cervical cancer.

The routine HPV immunisation schedule is two doses of vaccine to complete the full course, typically given in S1 and S2. Eligible pupils who have not started or completed their course of immunisations are given other opportunities to be vaccinated in S3 and S4.

The policy set in Scotland for eligible cohorts for teenage immunisation programmes is defined by academic year as opposed to date of birth.

Therefore any boy that was in S1 for the 2019/2020 academic year will be offered vaccination and remain eligible up to his 25th birthday. The Scottish policy (along with the rest of the UK) does not recommend a catch up programme so any boys in academic years above S1 in 2019/2020 were not eligible.

Approaches to policy implementation across the devolved administrations can vary due to different factors and this has been seen in other childhood programmes in the past. School years can differ across the four Nations and hence different approaches are adopted however, children in S1 are usually 12 to 13 years old by the end of the academic session therefore a similar cohort. This is reflected in the associated Green Book Chapters, for example, in this case, there is a reference to DOB but specifically makes reference to England.

As mentioned above, the programme for girls began in 2008 and since its introduction, the prevalence of HPV infection has reduced dramatically amongst girls due to the direct protection provided by the vaccine. As this is a sexually transmitted infection, the incidence among boys has also reduced, due to indirect protection. The JCVI does not currently recommend a 'catch up' programme for boys, as evidence suggests they are already benefitting greatly from the indirect protection built up over 12 years of the girls' HPV vaccination programme.

When any vaccination programme is introduced decisions must be taken in relation to the eligibility criteria based on the available clinical advice. Further information around the JCVI's decision can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726319/JCVI_Statement_on_HPV_vaccination_2018.pdf