

# HPV vaccination rates lower among the wealthy

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Parents in higher socio-economic areas are less likely to allow their children to be vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV), new research from Massey University indicates.

HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that can lead to cervical and other cancers. A government-funded immunisation programme targets girls in Year 8 and requires parental approval.

Postgraduate researcher Karen Page who is studying with Massey's College of Health wants to find out why New Zealand's vaccination rate is much lower than other countries like Australia and the UK.

She has discovered that [vaccination rates](#) in high decile schools are 20 per cent lower than in low decile schools in the catchment area of the Whanganui District Health Board and would like to extend this research to the rest of the country.

Nationally, statistics show that uptake among Māori, Pacific and Asian populations is higher than among New Zealand Europeans.

"We don't yet know why these patterns are occurring," she says. "I'm about to embark on doctoral research that will hopefully provide some answers."

Overall only 58 per cent of Year 8 girls in New Zealand are currently vaccinated – a much lower rate than countries like the UK, at 86 per

cent, and Australia, at over 70 per cent.

"This is concerning because HPV is the most common [sexually transmitted infection](#). At some point in their lives, 80 per cent of all adults will have it," Ms Page says.

"Most of the time the virus clears, but in some instances it can become more serious."

Ms Page, a Whanganui-based public [health](#) specialist, is seeking parents and health workers to complete surveys so that she can continue her research, looking further into why vaccination rates are lower in certain demographics.

"My aim is to look at the who, where and why parents are declining this vaccination for their children, and to examine the attitudes of health professionals towards the [vaccine](#)."

The rates for Year 8 girls completing all three doses of the HPV vaccination last year in New Zealand are as follows:

- All – 58%
- Maori – 62%
- Pacific – 71%
- Asian – 63%
- Other (mainly NZ European) – 52%

The following data relates to the Whanganui District Health Board catchment area only:

- Low decile schools (the lowest quintile) consent rate: 74%
- High decile schools (the highest quintile) consent rate: 54%
- Urban area consent rate: 69%

- Non-main urban area consent rate: 65%

Often the HPV infection clears on its own, but some strains can linger and lead to cancers of the cervix, anus, vagina, throat and in men, the penis. Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women, killing more than 270,000 women annually around the world, according to the World Health Organisation.

HPV also causes genital warts and respiratory papillomatosis, and may increase the likelihood of adverse pregnancy events for women that have had treatment for cervical cell changes (i.e. miscarriage, low birth weight and prematurity).

Provided by Massey University

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