Dear Colleague:

Re: New Immunization Program for Grade 6 and Grade 9 girls

The Ministries of Health and Education are pleased to offer a new cancer prevention immunization program to enhance student health. The BC government supports this cancer prevention initiative as an effective strategy to protect girls and young women from cervical cancer.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine will be offered free to all girls in grades 6 and 9 starting in the 2008/2009 school year. This vaccine will be provided in addition to existing immunization programs such as Hepatitis B, Meningococcal C and Chickenpox in grade 6 and Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis in grade 9.

The HPV vaccine protects against two types of Human Papillomavirus that cause 70% of all cases of cancer of the cervix. HPV vaccine programs have already started in several provinces in Canada, and more provinces will be starting programs this fall. The vaccine was approved for use in Canada in 2006 and is highly effective.

The vaccine will be provided to girls in BC in grades 6 and 9 because:
- Girls and women are best protected when they get the HPV vaccine before they become sexually active.
- The vaccine prevents HPV infection but does not get rid of it once the infection occurs.
- The lining of the reproductive tract in teenage girls is still developing which makes it easier for them to get infected with HPV.

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Three out of four sexually active women will get HPV at some point in their lives. Every year in BC:
- 150 women will get cervical cancer.
- 40 women will die from the disease.
- 6,000 women will develop high risk changes to the cervix which are precancerous.
- 10,000 women will need invasive procedures to stop cancer of the cervix from developing.

Public Health Nurses will be contacting schools very shortly to discuss implementation logistics.
We thank you in advance for your continued support in our shared goal of keeping BC children healthy through our school-based immunization programs.

More information about HPV can be found at www.immunizebc.ca.

Sincerely,

P.R.W. Kendall
OBC, MBBS, MSc, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer