

PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE HPV VACCINATION COVERAGE IN KRAPINA ZAGORJE COUNTY, CROATIA

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Background: Cervical cancer is an important health issue in Croatia, with around 320 cases and 120 deaths annually over the past decade. In 2022, Krapina Zagorje County recorded 40 new cases and 3 deaths. Human papilloma virus (HPV) causes nearly 99% of these cancers. It also causes cancers of the anus, vulva, vagina, penis, and oropharynx, and genital warts in both sexes. HPV vaccination and early detection through Pap smears are two essential tools in the fight against cervical cancer. HPV vaccination was introduced in 2015 in Croatia and is free and voluntary for everyone until 25 years old.

Methods and Objectives: Since school year 2015/2016 HPV vaccination provided in schools is available to all eighth-grade students, and since 2023/2024 to students from fifth to eighth grade.

School medicine doctors vaccinate students, while others can receive the vaccine at public health epidemiological clinics, which are also included in vaccination promotion and provide information about vaccines.

In Krapina Zagorje County, public health interventions aimed at increasing vaccination coverage were implemented since 2015 and included: students' education in person, parents' education in person, and vaccination in schools. In 2019 we introduced parents' reminder system, and switched to parents' education thorough informative consent leaflet. In 2024, a comprehensive campaign was implemented and included multi-sector and multilevel cooperation within the Institute's departments, Non-governmental organizations, the General Hospital, the Medical Faculty, media and Local authorities.

Results: From 2015 until 2018 Krapina Zagorje County had under 50% of vaccinated students each year. Since 2019, we continuously reached vaccination coverage over 70%, which makes us the County with the best vaccination coverage in Croatia, aiming to 90%.

Conclusions: In order to achieve the desired vaccination coverage, it is necessary to clearly define the strategy of HPV vaccination promotion, create an implementation project plan, and expand the collaboration at multiple levels vertically and horizontally.

Keywords: coverage, intervention, HPV, prevention, vaccination