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Almost 30% of girls turning 15 not fully immunised against HPV

Around 38,400 of the estimated 137,460 girls aged 15 in 2013 were not fully immunised against the highly contagious virus that can cause cervical cancer, with coverage rates as low as 56% in some areas, a new report from the National Health Performance Authority finds.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus which for most people is harmless and without symptoms. However, for others the virus can cause a range of cancers, such as cervical cancer and other conditions such as genital warts. Four out of five people will have an HPV infection at some stage of their lives.

The new report shows HPV immunisation rates for girls who turned 15 in 2013 by two levels of geography – by 31 areas covered by the new Primary Health Networks (PHNs), and by more than 80 smaller areas that cover all of Australia, known as Statistical Areas Level 4 (SA4s) – the smallest areas for which HPV immunisation rates have been reported to date.

The report shows that out of the 137,460 girls estimated to be aged 15 in 2013, almost three-quarters of girls (72%, or 99,011 girls) were fully immunised against HPV. The report further reveals:

- The five PHN areas with the highest percentages of girls fully immunised against HPV had coverage rates between 89% and 78%, while the six PHN areas with the lowest percentages had coverage rates between 66% and 56%
- The five local areas (SA4s) with the highest percentages of girls fully immunised against HPV had coverage rates between 94% and 84%, while the five local areas with the lowest percentages had coverage rates between 60% and 56%.

National Health Performance Authority CEO Dr Diane Watson said today's report provided the most nationally consistent data by local area available on HPV rates.

"Communities now have the clearest picture yet on where HPV immunisation rates are high and low. This new information will assist to better target strategies to improve HPV immunisation rates," Dr Watson said.

"The National HPV Vaccination Program was introduced in 2007, to protect girls against infection by a virus known to cause cervical cancer."

The report also includes changes over time and state and territory level rates. The *Healthy Communities: HPV immunisation rates for girls in 2013*, In Focus report can be downloaded at www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au

Work is currently under way by the Performance Authority to increase the amount of nationally consistent information about health and care among people who live in PHN areas and local areas within them. The Performance Authority's MyHealthyCommunities website

allows users to compare results for more than 130 measures, while the website's MyReport tool allows users to create customised reports tailored to the particular health information that interests them.

The Performance Authority plans to release its third report on child immunisation rates in the coming months. This includes child immunisation rates in 2013–14 by PHN area, Statistical Areas Level 3 and postcode, where the data is available.

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Note to media:

- Differences in HPV immunisation rates reported elsewhere are due to different methods used to allocate results to geographic areas and differences in the date of data extraction from the HPV Program Register.
- As the HPV program targets girls aged 12–13 years, and the report refers to girls turning 15, results may reflect the local-level effectiveness of the HPV immunisation program before 2013. This is because most girls will have received their three injections during 2010 and 2011.

