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Knowledge of HPV and attitudes to HPV vaccination among Swedish high school students

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Objectives: To investigate knowledge of human papillomavirus (HPV) and attitudes to HPV vaccination and condom use among Swedish first year high school students.

Methods: In 2008, a classroom questionnaire was completed by 608 students from a strategic sample of seven high schools in a medium-sized city in Sweden.

Results and Conclusions: The knowledge of HPV and of HPV vaccines was very low among first year high school students, despite marketing directed at potential vaccine consumers. Only 14% (n=82) of the students had heard about HPV and 6% (n=35) were aware of HPV vaccination. Girls and students in theoretical study programs generally had higher knowledge than boys and students in vocational programs. The students' attitude towards vaccination was positive but most of them requested more information before considering vaccination (73%, n=443). Many students would like to receive such information from the school nurse (36%, n=220) or from the Youth clinic (31%, n=186). School nurses and nurse midwives thus have an important role to play in providing reliable information and counselling. The high cost of vaccination was the greatest obstacle (total group 37%, n=227); among girls the second major hindrance was the fear of needles (19%, n=65). Over 80% (n=512) of the students stated that they would be more inclined to be vaccinated if they knew that the vaccine also protected against genital warts. The students considered it less likely that they would use a condom when having intercourse with a new partner if they were vaccinated than if they were not (p<0.001). This risk should be taken seriously when planning information strategies about HPV.