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Oz School Girls Hospitalized After HPV Vaccine

By Danialle Cronin
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Six Canberra schoolgirls were taken to hospital after they suffered a bad reaction to a vaccine to protect them against cervical cancer, health officials said yesterday. Girls in Sydney and Melbourne had also complained about side-effects including dizziness, fainting, nausea and temporary paralysis after they were immunised.

Health Minister Tony Abbott urged parents to continue vaccinating their children against cervical cancer despite the emerging reports.

ACT Acting Chief Health Officer Charles Guest said there had been six instances where Canberra girls had been taken to hospital for observation after an adverse reaction to the vaccine, Gardasil.

They experienced symptoms such as fainting and anxiety but were not seriously unwell. The girls spent a short time in hospital and were sent home after they were checked by medical staff.

"We're taking the reports seriously and we will continue to monitor the situation," Dr Guest said. "But we always monitor vaccine side-effects very carefully and if a pattern emerges that will be investigated in due course.

"I think the message would be that the vaccine appears to be safe and we are encouraging people to continue with the program at this point."

About 4000 Canberra schoolgirls had been vaccinated since the Federal Government's immunisation program kicked off a few weeks ago.

Females aged 12 to 26 would be vaccinated against the human

papilloma virus, which caused about 70 per cent of cervical cancers.

More than 200 Australian women die annually from cervical cancer, and Gardasil developed by 2006 Australian of the Year Professor Ian Frazer is the world's first vaccine against the disease.

It emerged that five Melbourne schoolgirls were also taken to hospital after they received the vaccine.

The five students from Sacred Heart Girls' College were among more than 20 who reported to the school's sick bay on May 7 after being injected with Gardasil.

"A number of students were transported to Monash Medical Centre and two were kept overnight for observation and discharged the next day," a spokesman for the Victorian Department of Human Services said.

Student Natasha D'Souza said she collapsed and was left paralysed for six hours after being injected. "I couldn't move at all. There were girls dropping like flies, basically," she said. Ms D'Souza said she had been vaccinated in the past but her reaction to Gardasil was different.

Fellow student Brooke Levy, who was taken to hospital, said she thought she might pass out or vomit after she was vaccinated. But authorities believed their reactions were likely to be related to having an injection not the vaccine itself. Mr Abbott said it was not usual for people to experience side-effects such as fainting, dizziness, headaches or skin rash but these were rarely serious.

"While certainly I have asked for further checks to be done because it's very important we assure ourselves that this vaccine is as safe as reasonably possible I would counsel parents against undue alarm," Mr Abbott said.

"I would strongly discourage parents from preventing these vaccinations from going ahead because cervical cancer kills some 270 Australian women every year."

Sacred Heart Girls' College headmaster Christopher Dalton said hospital staff had told teachers that the girls' reactions were not related to the vaccination itself.

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