



## Cervical cancer elimination threatened by pandemic disruptions and funding

- *HPV vaccination coverage to prevent cervical cancer has improved globally but COVID-19 has slowed the rate of implementation of routine immunisation programmes.*
- *Disruptions caused by pandemic, including delays in vaccination, screening, treatment and scale-up of measures, threaten to undermine efforts to reach global elimination targets and could lead to a significant increase in cervical cancer-related deaths in 78 LMICs.*
- *Among other actions, UICC is working to increase access to screening and treatment in LMICs through SUCCESS (Scale-up Cervical Cancer Elimination with Secondary prevention Strategy), a project funded by Unitaid and led by Expertise France in collaboration with Jhpiego and UICC.*

**Tuesday 16 January 2021. Geneva, Switzerland** – A year after the launch of WHO’s Global Strategy to eliminate cervical cancer, the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) draws attention to the impact of delays due to COVID-19 in implementing the Strategy, while emphasising the importance of mobilising greater funding in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

LMICs continue to carry an overwhelming share of the global burden of cervical cancer, accounting for some 90% of all related premature deaths. Few diseases so starkly reflect global health discrepancies and inequity.

As of June 2020, over half of WHO Member States had introduced vaccination against the human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes most cases of cervical cancer, and UICC welcomes and is encouraged by this development. While HPV vaccination has been available since 2007, 95% of the more than 100 million girls vaccinated between 2007-2017 are from high-income countries where immunisation programmes are now routine.

COVID-19 has now slowed the implementation of new immunisation programmes. The pandemic has caused delays and disruptions to ongoing trials of one-dose HPV vaccination, screening programmes, treatments, as well as to the supply of reagents and testing systems diverted to the COVID-19 response. These disruptions are undermining efforts in prevention and treatment to reach global elimination targets for cervical cancer.

The COVID-19 and Cancer Global Modelling Consortium, of which UICC is a part, presented findings at UICC’s recent World Cancer Leaders’ Summit that highlighted the risk of a significant increase in cervical cancer-related deaths in 78 LMICs due to delays in vaccination, screening, treatment and scale-up of measures.

*“The threat of a significant rise in cervical cancer-related deaths due to disruptions caused by COVID-19 to vaccination and screening programmes and treatment should serve to reaffirm global commitment to elimination and the importance of building more resilient and equitable health systems,”* says Dr Cary Adams, CEO of UICC. *“An average of USD 0.40 per person per year in low-income settings is required to finance elimination through vaccination, screening and early*



*treatment. Alongside the lives saved, the return is substantial in terms of improved health for women, higher participation of women in the workforce, and greater family and social cohesion and stability.”*

Rwanda demonstrates that it is possible for low-income countries to achieve WHO targets. In 2011, the country became the first African nation to implement an HPV vaccination programme. As a result, **population-level coverage increased** from 6% for girls born in 1993 up to a maximum of 99% for those born in 2002. In line with the other pillars of the Strategy, Rwanda also implemented a **Screen, Notify, See, and Treat cervical cancer screening programme** in 2013 for women aged 35-45.

Overall, **a comprehensive programme to implement HPV vaccination and screening in 50 LMICs could avert** 5.2 million cases, 3.7 million deaths and 22 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) over ten years, at a total cost of USD 3.2 billion per year.

### **Supporting the cancer community to accelerate cervical cancer elimination**

UICC continues to deploy a comprehensive set of activities in support of the implementation of the Global Strategy, for example, in working to increase access to screening and treatment in LMICs through **SUCCESS** (Scale-up Cervical Cancer Elimination with Secondary prevention Strategy), a project funded by Unitaïd and led by Expertise France in collaboration with Jhpiego and UICC. The project supports four target countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guatemala and the Philippines) and seeks to share the learning and expertise gained to other LMICs in the respective regions.

The project has overseen an expansion of HPV testing, training of clinical and laboratory staff, strengthening of diagnostic capacity and an increase in the number of devices available for the treatment of precancerous lesions. In addition, the SUCCESS project aims to mobilise and support civil society to raise awareness and advocate for improved cervical cancer screening and treatment, long-term sustainability and the implementation of the Strategy at the national level.

One of the three key strategic enablers highlighted in the Global Strategy is health financing. In support of this, UICC also commissioned a report published in 2021 by The Economist Intelligence Unit entitled **Global action on financing cervical cancer elimination: funding secondary prevention services in low resource settings**, and continues these efforts through national-level analysis of funding available.

UICC’s ‘**cervical cancer hub**’ provides access to information, resources, videos, infographics, news articles and blogs about and from UICC’s members, as well as a series of Virtual Dialogues on elimination. UICC also leverages other established UICC programmes to strengthen its support to the elimination ambition, for example, through Technical Fellowships, Young Leaders Programme and the Master courses.

**Watch “Financing for cervical cancer elimination: Global, regional and national perspectives”,** which highlights the key findings from the Economist Intelligence Unit’s report, moderated by Charles Goddard, Editorial Director at The Economist Group.

**Watch “Modeling our way out of pandemic: Cancer prevention to treatment continuum”,** organized by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, which showcases the importance of data modelling in



*understanding the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on cancer, with an eye on pandemic recovery in the future.*

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#### **About the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)**

The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) is the largest and oldest international cancer-fighting organisation. Founded in Geneva in 1933, UICC has over 1,200 member organisations in 172 countries. It enjoys consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UICC has over 50 partners, including associations, companies and foundations committed to the fight against cancer. UICC is a founding member of the NCD Alliance, the McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer and the International Cancer Control Partnership (ICCP) and established the City Cancer Challenge Foundation in January 2019.

UICC's mission is to both unite and support the cancer community in its efforts to reduce the global cancer burden, promote greater equity and ensure that cancer control remains a priority on the global health and development agenda. It pursues these goals by bringing together global leaders through innovative and far-reaching cancer-control events and initiatives, building capacities to meet regional needs and developing awareness campaigns.

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