

# Men could receive jab against sex virus to cut cancer rates

IN A revolutionary move, men could be vaccinated against a sexually transmitted virus – to cut down Ireland's alarmingly high rates of cervical cancer.

A vaccine aimed at women was licensed last month but now **'Men harbour HPV and transmit it'**

Miriam O'Callaghan. Urging women to have smear tests, the presenter, who lost her 31-year-old sister, Ann, to breast cancer, said her death had helped focus her mind on the importance of health.

'An awful lot of women live difficult lives; they are so busy the last thing that they think about is their own health.'

The CERVICA project involves researchers at seven Irish universities, eight hospitals and ten commercial diagnostic and biotechnology companies.

And Trinity College scientists are to explore the possibility that men should now be vaccinated. John O'Leary, Professor of Pathology at TCD, said: 'Men harbour HPV and transmit it. If they were vaccinated against it, it could reduce the transmission rate. It's a bold statement but it is something that needs to be looked at.'

'We are hoping to work with vaccine manufacturers on this idea and

experts are seeking to dwarf the transmission rate of the virus that causes the killer cancer by offering men the simple jab.

The Human Papilloma Virus or HPV is described as the 'number one suspect' cause of cervical cancer. The cancer, which is preventable, kills 70 women each year.

to examine the possibility of a trial.'

He said if the project was viable, the Department of Health and the HSE would be lobbied to make funding available to vaccinate men.

Gráinne Flannelly, consultant obstetrician at the National Maternity Hospital, said HPV was 'the number one suspect' cause of cervical cancer.

It is believed five to 10 per cent of the female population have the virus. And about 80 per cent of women are infected with HPV at some stage in their lifetime.

The virus normally clears naturally within nine to 15 months but persistent infection is thought to be the cause of cervical pre-cancer.

Dr Flannelly said evidence showed that the HPV vaccine was effective and significantly reduced the changes of infections that lead to the majority of cancer cases. TCD scientist Dr Orla Sheils said deaths from cervical cancer were 'poignant because they are not just treatable

Ireland has one of the highest incidences of the disease in Western Europe with 200 new cases confirmed annually but there is not yet a national screening programme.

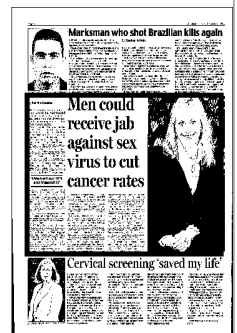
The proposal comes as part of a major €1.25million cervical screening research programme launched yesterday by Prime Time presenter

but preventable'. She said it was not 'pie in the sky' but 'potentially achievable' to eradicate the disease with vaccination and testing.

But one scientist hit out at Ireland making the HPV vaccine available for women before the nationwide cervical screening programme is rolled out in 2008.

Ivan Silva of Norwegian biotech company NoRchip said: 'There is concern about this situation in Ireland which is being called the "mother syndrome". The vaccine has not shown to be hugely effective for women over the age of 30. But when they go to the doctor to get their teenage daughters vaccinated they may ask for it too.'

'They may not then feel like they have to avail of a cervical cancer screening programme but that is not the case. They are still at risk. If you have been sexually active before you get the vaccine it may not prevent cervical cancer.'





**Call for vigilance: Prime Time presenter Miriam O'Callaghan**