VICTORIA – Beginning this September, boys and young men up to age 26 who are at a higher risk of contracting human papillomavirus virus (HPV) can receive the HPV vaccine at no charge.

B.C.’s publicly funded HPV vaccination program, which is provided to girls, will be extended to at-risk boys and young men – those who have sex with males or who are street-involved. Providing the vaccine for all girls protects heterosexual boys as well, but leaves at-risk boys and young men unprotected. This change will address that gap.

“The human papillomavirus virus is the most common sexually transmitted infection,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “It can lead to serious health problems and could develop into an HPV-related cancer. Our vaccination program will help protect all young British Columbians from cancers and other diseases caused by HPV infection.”

Extending B.C.’s HPV program to at-risk boys and young men provides protection to those who are most vulnerable to HPV infection and related disease. Girls-only HPV vaccine programs where more than 50% of girls are vaccinated has protective effects on heterosexual boys and young men but has little to no impact on boys and young men who are at higher risk.

“Among males, men who have sex with men carry a disproportionately high burden of HPV infection and a significant burden of HPV-related cancers,” said Dr. Gina Ogilvie, Canada research chair in global control of HPV-related disease and cancer. “The targeted expansion of B.C.’s HPV vaccination program is an important step to controlling the spread of HPV infections and ultimately HPV related cancers.”

“It is clear that some men are more at risk for HPV related cancers than are others,” said Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “As most of these infections are vaccine-preventable, extending B.C.’s HPV immunization program to this at-risk demographic is a cost-effective way to provide protection to the people who need it most.”

At-risk boys, young men who have sex with men and parents who are concerned their sons may be vulnerable can arrange for the HPV immunization by visiting their local public health unit. This program will also be delivered through specialized clinics and programs for street-involved youth.

The Gardasil vaccine will be used in this HPV program. Gardasil protects against infection from HPV types 16 and 18 that cause about 70% of cervical cancers, 80% of anal cancers and other cancers of the mouth, throat, penis, vagina and vulva. It also protects against infection from HPV types 6 and 11 that cause about 90% of cases of genital warts.

Vaccines, including Gardasil, are only approved for use in Canada if they are proven to be safe.
and effective. Since the HPV vaccine was approved, 175 million doses have been provided worldwide. On-going monitoring of the vaccine shows it continues to be a low-risk option to help prevent HPV.

The Ministry of Health has developed “Setting Priorities for the B.C. Health System”, an overarching strategy to create a more sustainable health system. As part of this, a series of policy papers, including “Delivering a Patient-Centred, high performing and sustainable health system,” is focused on improving the health of British Columbians through effective health promotion and disease prevention strategies like B.C.’s immunization program, which protects British Columbians from up to 16 vaccine-preventable diseases, saving countless lives and preventing illness.

Learn more:

To learn more about B.C.’s immunization program, visit: http://immunizebc.ca

To learn more about the Ministry of Health’s priorities, visit: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=EF73BCF3DE34484CB4DBA9E34092402C

To learn more about the policy paper “Delivering a Patient-Centred, high performing and sustainable health system,” visit:

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