

Support for voluntary HPV school - based vaccination in Germany – results of a country-wide survey in 2022

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Background

The German Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) recommends vaccination against infection with human papillomaviruses (HPV) for children and adolescents between the ages of 9 and 14. Those who have not been vaccinated at this age are eligible to receive the vaccinations free of charge up to their 18th birthday. Although HPV vaccination rates in Germany have increased over the years, they still remained low in 2020, at about 51 percent and 17 percent of 15-year-old girls and boys, respectively³. In Germany, HPV vaccination, like many other vaccinations, is mainly administered by general practitioners in their practices¹. Based on the success reported from countries such as Australia and England, offering HPV vaccination in schools is an effective strategy to achieve high HPV vaccination rates^{2,4}. Hence, experts suggest that an organized, school-based HPV vaccination program could significantly increase vaccination rates in Germany as well¹. An important prerequisite for the success of such a program is a strong of support from the general public⁴.

Methods

In July 2022, the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) mandated a marketing research company to conduct a multi-topic survey by telephone. Persons aged 14 years and older with telephone connection, were interviewed about their support for regular, voluntary HPV vaccinations in German schools. The survey data were analyzed according to characteristics such as gender, age, level of education, location of residence (e.g., federal state) to identify possible association between the support and the above characteristics.

Results

High support for voluntary HPV-school-based vaccination

1013 persons in total were interviewed. Overall, more than two-thirds of respondents (71%) support voluntary HPV vaccination services in schools (Figure 1), 22% oppose it, and 6% do not know. More men (75%) than women (67%) support voluntary HPV vaccination in schools.

Adolescents and adults are particularly in favor

Support for voluntary HPV vaccination offers in schools is particularly high among adolescents aged 14 to 17 years (96%). This indicates that part of the target group for HPV vaccination is in favor of this vaccination offer in schools.

Adults aged 40 to 49 years are also highly in favor of HPV school vaccination (77%). This age group is likely to contain a relatively high proportion of parents of children in the target population. Support for voluntary HPV school-based vaccination is lowest among respondents aged 18 to 29 (66%) and those aged 70 and older (67%) (Figure 1).

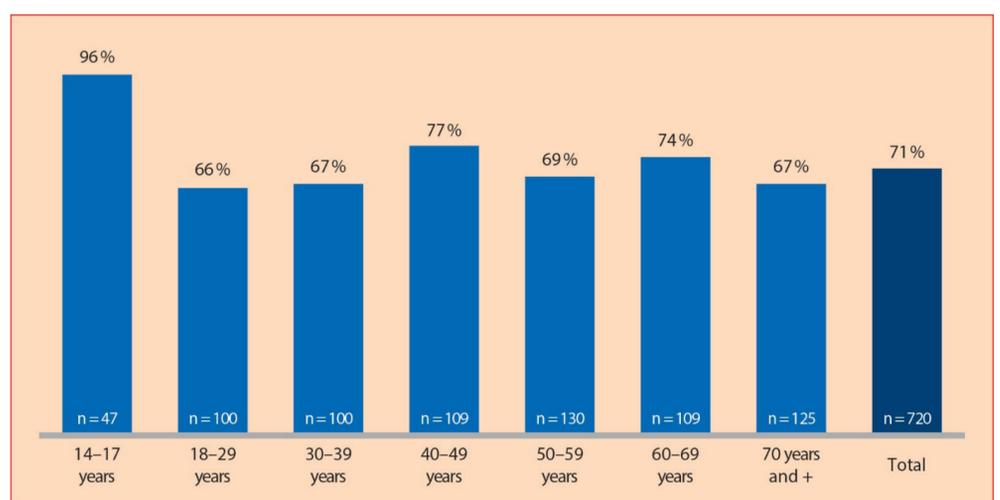


Figure 1: Respondents' support for voluntary HPV vaccination in schools by age group (n = number of respondents supporting a voluntary HPV school-based vaccination).

Educational level and Federal State play a role

The support for voluntary HPV school-based vaccination is particularly high among schoolchildren (an important target group for vaccination) (93%) and among high school graduates (75%). In addition, the degree of support increases with the level of education.

There are significant regional differences in the degree of support for voluntary HPV vaccination. Support is high Schleswig-Holstein (94%) and Saxony-Anhalt (93%). In contrast the lowest degree of support for the policy is in Mecklenburg Western Pomerania with 41%. The approval of voluntary HPV vaccination in schools seems to be independent of current HPV-vaccination rates of the federal states (Figure 2 and 3).

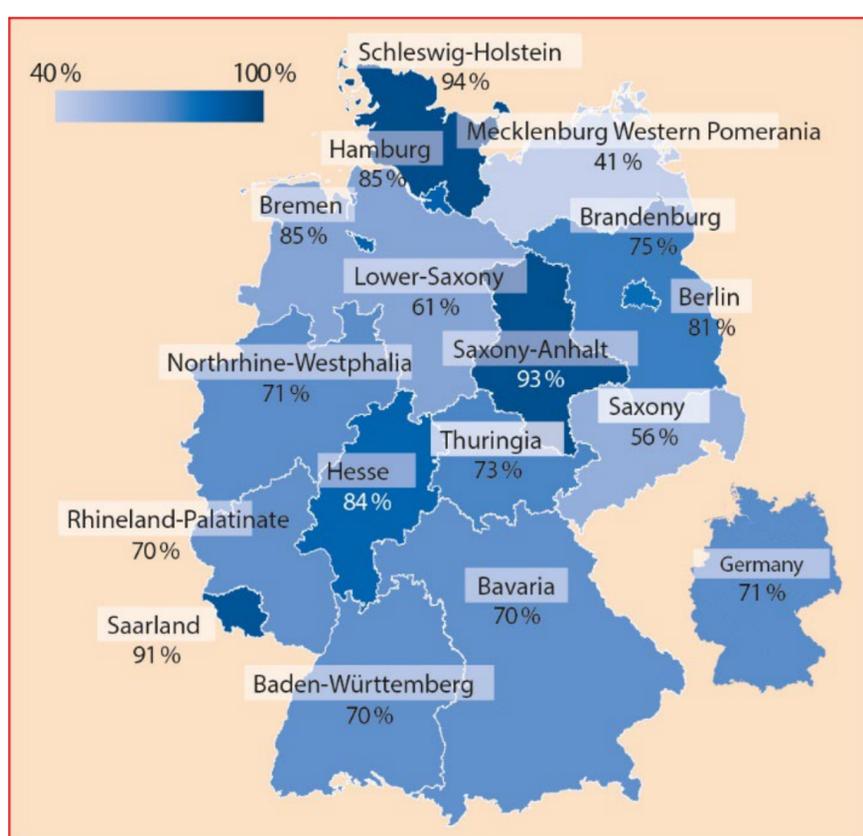


Figure 2: Respondents' support for voluntary HPV vaccinations in schools by federal state

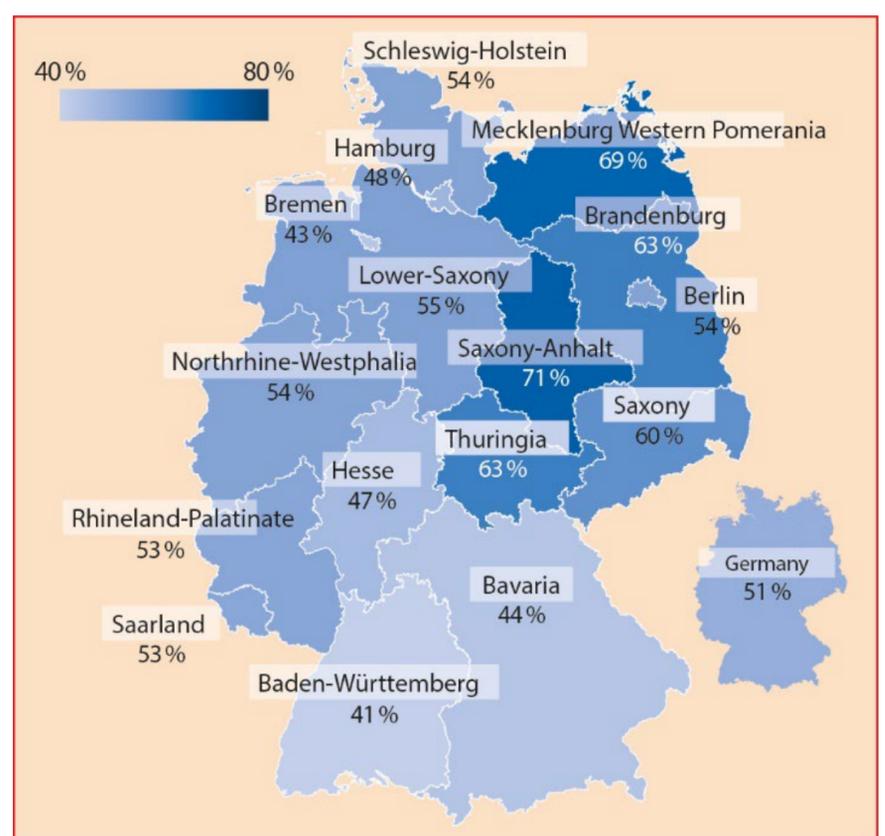


Figure 3: HPV vaccination coverage among 15-year-old girls in 2020 by federal state. Data: Rieck et al. 2022

Conclusion

This survey shows a high public support for HPV school-based vaccination, particularly among the target groups of the vaccine in Germany. Despite the difference in the degree of support with regard to gender, education level and federal states, which may challenge the program in Germany, the momentum of general high support should be used by policy makers for the implementation of school-based HPV vaccination in the country.

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