MSD Pharmaceuticals (India), the local affiliate of Merck & Co., Inc., announced the launch of GARDASIL® [Quadrivalent Human Papillomavirus (Types 6, 11, 16 and 18) Vaccine], India’s first vaccine to help prevent cervical cancer caused by the HPV types contained in the vaccine.

GARDASIL® is the only vaccine that helps protect against 4 types (Types 6, 11, 16, 18) of HPV. The vaccine helps prevent diseases such as cervical cancer; abnormal and precancerous cervical lesions, vaginal lesions, vulvar lesions, and genital warts, caused by these types of HPV. GARDASIL® is recommended to be given to females aged between 9 to 26 years. GARDASIL® is also the only U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved vaccine to help prevent against cervical cancer and other diseases caused by HPV types contained in the vaccine.

Cervical cancer, or cancer of the uterine cervix, is a serious disease that can be life-threatening. This disease is caused by certain high-risk HPV types that can cause the cells in the lining of the cervix to change from normal to precancerous lesions. If these precancerous lesions are not diagnosed early and treated, they may turn cancerous after a few years. Cervical cancer takes the lives of 8 women in India every hour. It is the commonest cause of cancer deaths among Indian women, and the second most common cause of cancer deaths among women worldwide. Every year, almost 74,000 women die due to cervical cancer in India, which is more than one fourth of the world deaths due to cervical cancer. Woman in India have a 2.5% life-time risk to get cervical cancer, which is double the risk as compared to the data worldwide (1.3%).

Dr Naveen A. Rao, managing director, MSD India, said they are committed to put patients first and work with partners and communities to enhance awareness for cervical cancer and access for the vaccine.
Dr Neerja Bhatla from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS, New Delhi) said placebo-controlled, double-blind, randomized, multicentric studies done in more than 20,000 females across 5 continents show that women who did not have evidence of exposure to HPV types contained in the vaccine GARDASIL® provides 98% protection against cervical pre-cancers caused by HPV types 16 & 18, which are responsible for 70% of all cervical cancer cases worldwide. Similarly, in large-placebo controlled, double-blind, randomized, multicentric studies, the vaccine has also been proven to be 99% effective in the prevention of genital warts caused by HPV types 6 and 11, which are responsible for 90% of all genital warts cases worldwide. In India, the number of cases is increasing every year. “This is a very promising breakthrough but women must remember that they still need to visit their doctors for regular screening for cervical and other cancers,” Dr Bhatla added.

Dr Y. K. Amdekar, from Jaslok & Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai, said: “This quadrivalent HPV vaccine, has demonstrated efficacy in a number of diseases including cervical cancer and genital warts. HPV vaccination is now unequivocally recommended by the IAP Committee of Immunization (COI) for females over the age of ten. This decision is based on expected high impact on public health in future as it will help prevent mortality due to cervical cancer in women in their prime age and keep families united and safe. We will be counseling parents about the risks of cervical cancer and the role of HPV while recommending the vaccination.”

According to the Indian Academy of Pediatrics Committee of Immunization (IAPCOI) 2008 recommendations: “This vaccine has a favorable tolerability profile and the IAP-COI recommends offering HPV vaccine to all females as per label. The recommended age for initiation of vaccination is 10-12 years and catch up vaccination is permitted up to the age of 26 years. It is recommended to be given in three doses at 0, 2 and 6 months.”

**About MSD India**

MSD Pharmaceuticals Private Limited (MSD India) is a wholly owned Indian subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc. incorporated in India in 2005. Since then, the company focuses on putting patients first and bringing first-in-class and best-in-class products which are relevant to India. MSD India has presence in four therapeutic areas, namely, critical care, cardiovascular diseases, metabolics and vaccines.

MSD also coordinates research projects with clinical investigators in India’s leading hospitals and universities. MSD India is collaborating with the Indian Council of Medical Research, as a public-private partnership to bring cervical cancer vaccine to the Indian public sector at an affordable price. ■