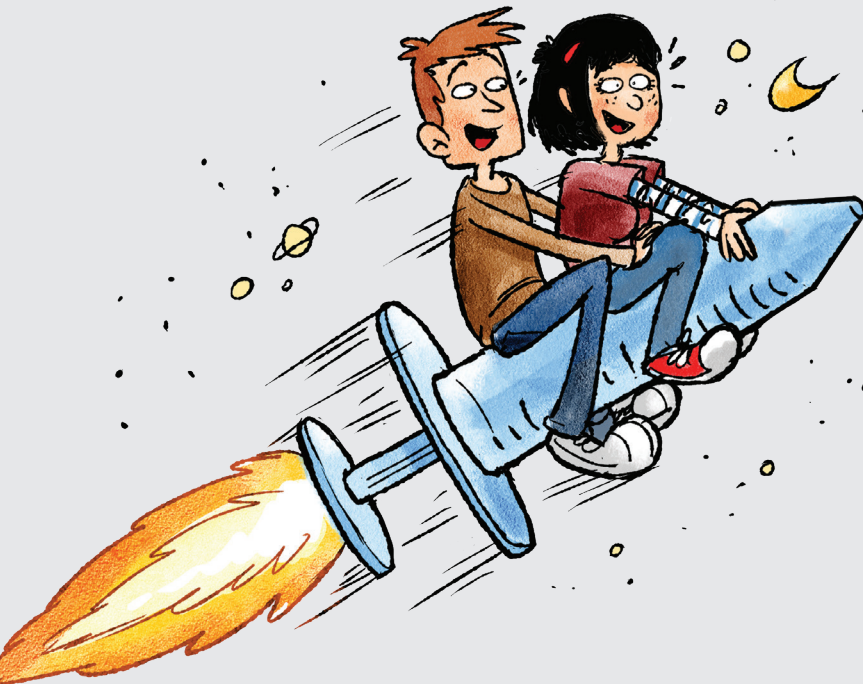


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**DEADLY
SERIOUSLY
ABOUT**

HPV





Deadly Seriously about HPV

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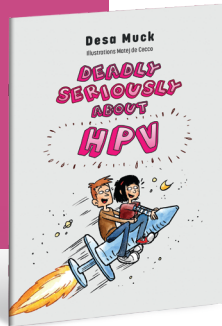
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Every one of you holding this booklet in your hands must be good parents, or you would not have picked it up. Each of you wants the best for your child, and above all, you wish them good health. Many of you already know about the human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes various diseases, including cancer. Many of you are also aware of the HPV vaccine and support it, while others may be unsure about opting for it or are even against it. We have no intention of convincing anyone of anything, or forcing people to believe something they do not. We just hope that after you read this booklet, you will at least consider the possibility and the advantages of this most effective protection.

THERE IS NO TASK MORE DEMANDING THAN BEING A PARENT! I WOULD MUCH RATHER GO TO BOTSWANA TO TRAIN CROCODILES TO LOOK AFTER BABY GOATS than go through all the stresses and strains of being a mother of three daughters again. Let's face it: sometimes only our strong love for our children helps us survive the most difficult periods. But even though I said I would rather go and train crocodiles – with all the feelings I have and will have for my children until the day I die, I know that I would go through it all again. And again. And a hundred times. I would go through their childhood illnesses again when the anxiety and fear take a few years off your life, the difficulties at school, the first disappointments with the world, the periods of stubbornness... not to mention puberty. We have all gone through the feelings of powerlessness, not knowing or not being able, as well as through self-questioning about our choices. We have raised and cared for our children when we were tired, sick and dealing with serious problems at work or in our relationships, the best way we knew how. For my part, I have even erased some periods from my memory to ease my guilty conscience.



For, as a mother, I have often made the wrong decisions due to lack of time, tiredness and, I must admit, sometimes out of convenience, and I still have to deal with the consequences of those decisions.

A very good friend of mine, let us call her Kate, has a daughter, let us call her Pippa, who is the same age as my own. We used to spend a lot of time together and the girls were like sisters when they were little. One day, this friend calls me. She tells me that her Pippa has cervical cancer. I freeze.

We immediately meet for coffee. Her hands are shaking so badly that I have to pour sugar into her coffee.

“Do you know what Pippa asked me when she found out?” she says, her eyes red. ***“She said, why didn’t you get me vaccinated against HPV!?*** ***Yes, that’s what she asked me...”*** The spoon clacked loudly against the rim of the cup.

This is how it was: Pippa and my youngest were the first generation to be offered the vaccine, at the time on a self-pay basis. I vaguely remember that our daughter brought me a scrap of paper from school with an invitation to get the HPV vaccine and an explanation. I just glanced at it.



“What on earth is this?! It’s the first time I’ve heard that you can get cancer from a virus!” I grumbled and asked her: ***“So? Are you going to get vaccinated?”***

“No, it’s stupid,” she says. ***“I don’t even know if anyone in the class is going to!”***

Because I had an overly democratic relationship with my daughters (which I sometimes regret now), and also because I simply did not feel like dealing with it, I threw the paper in the bin and

would have forgotten about it if Kate had not called me the next day and mentioned that annoying vaccination again.

“What do you think? Is there anything to it?” she asked me.

“I don’t think so! In our times, this... thing... virus... didn’t even exist! HPV?! PHV?! WTF?! Or whatever it’s called...” I reply. *“Our daughter won’t take the shot! It’s not compulsory anyway!”*

“You’re right! Then Pippa won’t take it either!” Kate agreed.

We then went on for a while about the government, which is always inventing new things just to impose more work and financial burdens on us.

And now, here we are, sitting in the café, staring at each other, barely breathing. A wave of guilt washes over me so strongly that I almost faint. Why didn’t I? Why didn’t I?! Why didn’t I then... I know she is thinking the same thing.

“But we didn’t know anything about it... it all seemed like an exaggeration, a fad... Isn’t it enough to go to the gynaecologist regularly?!... To attend the ZORA cervical cancer screening programme, like we do?” I rushed, but I knew that these were just excuses. Pretty pathetic ones, too. Because what Pippa had was **ACTUAL CANCER, NOT JUST AN OVERLOOKED CAVITY IN HER TOOTH**. I knew that I had not done my best to find information about this virus! In fact... at that point, I still knew nothing about it.

“Have you heard it’s sexually transmitted?” she asks me. Does that mean... My gosh?! It is not pleasant to associate your own children with sex.

“Does she know where she got it? Wait... does she have a boyfriend? I mean... can boys have this... virus too?” I ask, already knowing I’ve messed up. Where else could she have got it?! *“Maybe she borrowed a*



And yes, boys are carriers too. Not only that – they can get cancer as well!



swimsuit from an infected friend?”,
I try to correct myself.

“It doesn’t matter who she got it from or how! And yes, BOYS ARE CARRIERS TOO. NOT ONLY THAT – THEY CAN GET CANCER AS WELL!”

“But how? They don’t even have a cervix?!”

“They can get it on their penis, in their rectum, oral cavity... You name it!”

“What is more,” she says, “it is usually discovered at a later stage with men because there’s no screening programme for them.”

Shortly after that, as if by chance (which it probably wasn’t), I got a call from the Cancer Society. We started talking about how I could help prepare a brochure to help enlighten you, THE PARENTS OF PUPILS IN THE UPPER GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN YEAR 6, to help you learn more about the benefits of the HPV vaccine. At first, I had to wade through mountains of information to enlighten myself so I would not be spouting nonsense and half-truths. Now that the issue is clearer to me, I want to share with you what I have learned from the experts. This can save you a lot of time. BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, one day when your grown-up and seriously ill child asks why you didn’t make them get the vaccine on time, you will not have to answer the way my friend and I did: ***“I didn’t know anything about it!”***

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW to help you decide?!

WHAT IS A VIRUS ANYWAY?

Fortunately, you do not need a PhD to understand how a virus works. A virus is, well, a virus. And all viruses have one thing in common. They were in the world long before us; in fact, they were probably the first living beings in the world. Recent theories increasingly support the possibility that viruses created life on our planet so that they could survive, as they cannot reproduce on their own. So, they may have created us as well. This is put very simplistically, of course. Because they know us so well, they are our most effective enemy. There are currently about five thousand viruses known to be dangerous to humans. When the coronavirus disease broke out, I was haunted for a while by the feeling that viruses would not only be the first, but also the last form of life on earth.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED SO FAR WITH VACCINATION? OF THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE HISTORY OF VACCINATION

Vaccination against smallpox first appeared in China and India in the 16th century, though it may have originated earlier, perhaps even before Christ. From Turkey, it came to England, where it was perfected. This led scientists to think that many infectious diseases, with fatal or other serious consequences, could be prevented if dead pathogens, weakened or disabled by physicochemical processes, were introduced into our bodies. The patho-

gens were mainly derived from animals with the same or similar diseases. Today, vaccines are mostly synthetic and produced in laboratories.

The next revolutionary vaccine was against the then-uncontrollable rabies. Then against diphtheria, which killed a large number of Slovenian children even after the Second World War. Then against tuberculosis, which was merciless to anyone who got it. And so on. Vaccination has so far saved one and a half billion lives and completely eradicated smallpox. However, such results can only be achieved through good immunisation coverage. Some vaccinations are compulsory and there is no need to make any fuss about them because the side effects are insignificant, wear off quickly and are incomparable to the severe consequences of the illnesses if people have not been vaccinated.



HOW DOES A VIRUS BEHAVE WHEN IT ENCOUNTERS A VACCINE?

It goes roughly like this: the evil virus, in its desire to survive, smuggles itself triumphantly into our body (through the air, bodily fluids, insect bites, touch, etc.). Infectiousness is one of the most ingenious tricks that it has mastered. When this villain finds itself in our blood or mucous membranes, it smells that there are remains of its kinfolk in our body and says to itself: “Well, I have nothing more to do here! This beach is already taken.” It sighs in frustration and goes in search of a new victim.

The main point, of course, is that the vaccinated organism destroys it.

SO WHY ARE WE AGAINST VACCINATION IN GENERAL?

Interestingly, all the arguments have been the same for two hundred years, ever since the first smallpox vaccinations. Although I do not think we still believe that we are going to turn into cows, as they used to think back then, because the vaccine was made from the virus of a cow disease similar to our smallpox (vacca = cow; vaccine). However, there are still people who believe that we will all die sooner or later after vaccination. This is true in principle, as I have not yet met an immortal person, unless they are really good at hiding it. Throughout the history of vaccination, countless theories have been developed about the harms and dangers of vaccines. Some of them seem logical and need to be checked out, especially if we are more suspicious in nature. But there are also theories that go beyond all reasonable limits. From the one saying that vaccines were brought by aliens who want to exterminate us, to the stories of political conspiracies to inject us with vaccines containing microchips that turn us into living antennae so that we can all be controlled.

Such theories were rampant during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Internet played a major role in spreading the never-proven conspiracy theories backed up by photoshopped images and manipulated videos. They were also spread by various self-proclaimed “experts” and even by a few doctors, though from branches of medicine entirely unrelated to immunology, and a few scientists who later apologised. Slovenia has one of the highest percentages of people in the world who get a nervous breakdown the moment you mention vaccination. If this had been the case eighty years ago, Slovenians would have been extinct by now. In a way, I can understand that. The state and life itself, with their endless demands, are pressuring us from all sides and backing us into a corner. So, when we come across an opportunity to rebel and make our own choice, we seize it. Purely reflexively. Sometimes we do not even think about it. We cannot. We are already too angry at the world. And to be honest, many of the measures taken during the pandemic did indeed seem as though they had

been concocted at the Dumberville's village council meetings. Therefore: **EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO DECIDE ABOUT THEIR OWN HEALTH, ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY THINK IS BEST FOR THEM!**

HOWEVER, IT IS VERY QUESTIONABLE WHETHER WE ARE ALLOWED TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT OUR CHILDREN'S HEALTH WITHOUT COMPLETE AND OBJECTIVE INFORMATION. Do we have the right to ruin their future or even shorten their lives by relying solely on rumours and internet conspiracy theories? After the Covid-19 pandemic, the HPV vaccination of children, which until then had been on a good track, began to decline drastically.

My friend Kate's daughter was diagnosed with cervical cancer before it had spread fatally and she had it cut out. But the nightmare in their family is not over yet. We are now nervously wondering whether she will be able to

get pregnant, and if she does, whether she will be able to carry the child to term, or whether the more complicated pregnancy might have consequences for her child. When I wrote the manual **DEADLY SERIOUSLY ABOUT SEX** thirty years ago, I did so because there was not enough information available about the topic at the time. Today, the problems are completely different: in the flood of information, the biggest question is **WHO TO BELIEVE.**

SO PLEASE DO NOT SACRIFICE YOUR CHILDREN ON THE ALTAR OF YOUR OWN BELIEFS OR IGNORANCE!



Cervical cancer is the first cancer that could be eliminated.

WHAT IS HPV AND HOW DOES IT FUNCTION

There are around 200 genetic variants of HPV, which cause many different types of skin and mucosal diseases. The less dangerous ones cause various infections of the genitals and anus. For example, genital warts. I am not going to describe these, not because I don't have the vocabulary to do so, but because I do not even want to have to think about them. Even as it is, I am still haunted by the pictures from the Internet, especially those that have already proliferated. You can look them up yourself if you are interested. Infections can occur IN BOTH SEXES and, thank goodness, they are curable. But because they are a rather enthusiastic kind of infection, they can resist for a long time and fight stubbornly to survive.

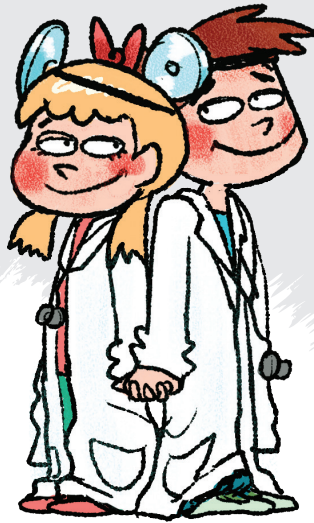
The more dangerous HPV genotypes cause precancerous lesions and, in turn, cancer. As mentioned above, in the cervix, but also in the vagina, on a women's external genitals and, in BOTH SEXES, in the anus and the part of the throat at the back of the mouth.

In boys, penile cancer can also occur. It can take several years from infection with the more dangerous genotypes to the onset of the disease. As many as ten to thirty years! A Slovenian study involving women aged 20-64 found that around two-thirds of them had already been infected with at least one of the 15 HPV genotypes at some point.

But for all of you who feel morally superior to those unprincipled rascals who indulge in sex before marriage or even commit adultery, it is time for some unpleasant news: HPV can be contracted by almost everyone who is sexually active, even in the most innocent ways.



**2/3 of women have
already been infected
with at least one HPV
genotype at some
point**



It is not just vaginal, anal and oral sex that can give you HPV, any skin-to-skin contact with the genital area can be enough. It can even be passed from a mother to a newborn during childbirth. I am quite sure I had it my entire youth. But I obviously did well in the viral lottery, because most of the time this devil disappears within two years without causing any harm. Unfortunately, not everyone is so lucky.



WHAT IS THE HPV VACCINE AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

The newest HPV vaccine, which is also used in Slovenia, is a 9-valent vaccine. This means that it protects against nine HPV genotypes. It can prevent most genital warts, reduce the chance of precancerous lesions and cervical cancer by 90%, and it also protects against other cancers caused by the most dangerous HPV genotypes. If you get the vaccine before your first sexual contact, you have a more than 95% chance of being protected against all the HPV genotypes included in the vaccine. If you get the vaccine later, there is a possibility that you are already infected and the protection will not be as effective.

SIDE EFFECTS

They are rare, mild and mostly do not cause serious problems.

WHY NOW IS THE RIGHT TIME

Let's say that you are thinking about vaccinating your 12-year-old against a sexually transmitted virus and you ask yourself: *"Why so early?! They are just kids!"*

You peek into your daughter's room, you glance at her collection of rainbow ponies. She pretends pink is a lame colour, even though yesterday she was all dressed in pink, and she definitely still loves cartoons. Her and sex?! No way! What about our boy? He is still secretly playing with action heroes and there is no sign of any peach fuzz on his face yet. Only yesterday, he was driving his toy cars around the living room. Okay, now he is playing computer games, but it is obvious he is not the least bit interested in sex, unless it involves newts or spiders.



We can breathe a sigh of relief: we need not worry about this disgusting sexually transmitted virus – at least for a few more years! With a bit of luck, our kids will wait with sex until they have their own flat and it is time for grandchildren. But... are you sure your children are telling you everything? If they are thinking about sex, or surfing the Internet about it, or talking about it with their friends, you will be the last person in the world they will tell.

Think about yourself at that age. Did you ever come running home and shouting before even opening the door: ***“Mum, Dad, I had my first kiss today!”*** Or even: ***“Today I lost my virginity!”***

And then you popped the champagne, invited the neighbours over and the whole village had a picnic.

Times have changed of course since we were 12 years old. Today, women start having sex earlier than we did, and they give birth much later. Our parents did not discuss sex with us; it was an uncomfortable, even shameful topic. At the age of twelve, I still believed that children grew on a bush. But by the age of thirteen at the latest, we were suddenly very interested in the opposite sex, and every now and then, a new school couple hatched. On school trips, we played a range of popular games involving first kisses and thus the first transmissions of fluids and viruses.

“Yeah, okay,” I hear you saying. ***“Maybe they’ve been exploring a body other than their own a little bit. Or maybe they soon will. But it won’t be real sex yet!”*** Well, you do not know that, do you? Then you will say: ***“They’ve been taught about safe sex. Surely they will know how to get condoms!”*** M-hm. The virus also lurks in the mouth and around the genitals and maybe other places as well. So, a condom will not help much, unless you cover your child with it from top to toe.

When it comes to protection against the virus, condoms do reduce the risk of infection, and, of course, being faithful and not changing partners

helps as well. But how much influence will we really have on the sex life of our teenager, who will not tell us anything about it?! Certainly not much.

THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR EARLY VACCINATION IS THE FACT THAT THE VACCINE HAS THE GREATEST EFFECT AND OFFERS THE GREATEST PROTECTION DURING EARLY PUBERTY. After the age of 15, when they will be able to decide on their own, youngsters will need more doses, and oh, I should not forget ... last but not least, after the age of 26, vaccination will no longer be free, even for those who have been part of the vaccination programme.

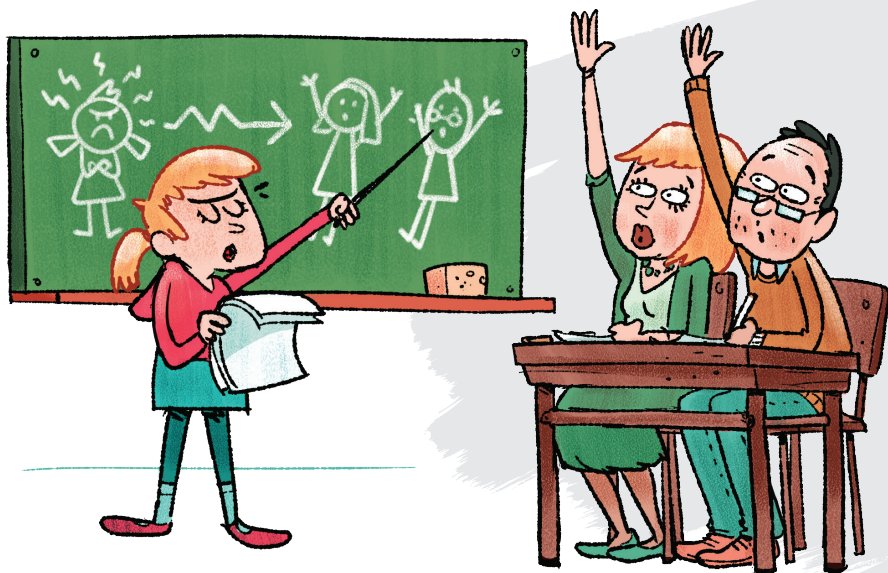
We must bear in mind that children today, at the age of 12, know far more about sexuality than we ever did, and they also expect us to talk to them about it openly and age-appropriately from pre-school. This, however, does not mean that vaccination can influence and accelerate premature sex, especially not because it is linked to **SAFE SEX** education. Premature sex is influenced by other factors in the environment and, of course, by hormones. You know, some people mature earlier and others later. Nor does vaccination affect fertility, which is another of the silly fictions that you may come across. In fact, I have seen some very clever claims on the forums about women becoming infertile after vaccination. Since no sources were given, this must surely have been discovered by those scientists who live in the tunnels beneath the surface of the Moon, have cabbage leaves for skin and brains weighing eighty kilograms, and are concerned only with the harmful effects of vaccination. Thank goodness there has not been a single case of this correlation proven on our planet so far.

NOW WHAT?

All of you who are planning to vaccinate your children against HPV, those of you who have not yet decided, but also those of you who will be against all vaccinations until you die, must be asking yourselves: *“If I decide in favour of vaccination, how will I convince my child if they are against it!”?*

Try to remember why you would have been against vaccination when you were young. No doubt you were scared of the jab, or at least uncomfortable at the thought of it. I know a few adult heroes, male in particular, who faint at the mere sight of a needle. Obviously, you cannot tell a 12-year-old that a little bee will just give them a tiny little sting – they are certainly ready for a mature conversation about the needle.

Another reason why **A TEENAGER WILL OPPOSE VACCINATION IS THAT HIS SCHOOLMATES AND FRIENDS ARE AGAINST IT AS WELL.** This reason is very strong. You will need the help of the school, which will organise a lesson for the pupils about the vaccination and the damage caused by the virus, and an informed teaching staff. If your child's class teacher is anti-vaccine, do not count on them. It is also a good idea to get in touch with like-minded parents of classmates and friends. Anyway, if your child is already familiar with the virus and is talking to peers and friends about the vaccine, even if they are against it, that is certainly a good sign in itself.



The last and perhaps the strongest reason is the legendary Slovenian stubbornness. And if you add puberty to that, rebelliousness is a young person's natural state of mind and body. And rightly so, as they are embarking upon a life's path of their own. **HOWEVER, IT BECOMES A PROBLEM WHEN THEIR RESISTANCE HARMS THEMSELVES, especially when IT HARMS THEIR HEALTH.** In the children of rebellious Slovenian parents, the very fact that someone is trying to impose their beliefs on them triggers defensiveness and negative attitudes. Then, as the interlocutor, you have almost zero chance of changing their mind. Think for a moment about yourself as a teenager again, and also about yourself as you are now. Instead of forcing and ordering, which can be perceived as your helplessness and ignorance, it would be better to offer a conversation. This will let your children know that you are taking their opinions into account and that you



Keep it short and do not fall into endless lecturing and an omniscient attitude.



take them seriously. Ask! What do they already know about the virus and vaccination? What do they think about it? Why? What are their arguments against it? When they have told you everything they have to say on the subject, ask them if you can give your opinion. Keep it short and do not fall into endless lecturing and an omniscient attitude. Do not give orders without argumentation (“because I said so”), because this makes them lie; do not blackmail them (“I will

be sad and the other mothers will despise me”). Calmly present the facts, in no more than three minutes, then ask **IF WHAT YOU HAVE TOLD THEM HAS CHANGED THEIR OPINION IN ANY WAY.** Even if it has not, you have not caused any resistance and your child is likely to at least think about the topic. Real stories of people who have not been vaccinated and have become seriously ill will also be very helpful. Like the story of my friend and her daughter, and let's not forget that it could have been a son too! For example, I was very touched when I heard an experienced doc-

tor say in a lecture: *“I will never forget how difficult it was for me when I went to relieve the pain of a very young patient who was dying of cervical cancer a long time ago. At that time, we knew nothing about HPV and the vaccine. And when the vaccine finally came along, I swore that no one in my area would ever die from HPV again!”* She kept her promise. Thanks to her engagement, immunisation coverage in the area where she works is now among the highest in Slovenia.

Anyway, at the end of the day, your children are minors, and **it is still you who make the decisions about their health**. We cannot pass the buck to them, who may be bright but are without life experience. And remember: just as the vaccine has a greater effect on those under the age of 15, so too will your explanations and clarifications.

GOOD LUCK TO YOU AND YOUR OFFSPRING!



“This booklet itself invites you to read it, as it presents the deadly serious information about HPV in a fun and easy-to-understand way. HPV vaccination really does save lives.”

Urška Ivanuš, PhD, MD, Specialist in Public Health, President of the Association of Slovenian Cancer Societies and Head of the National Cervical Cancer Screening Programme ZORA, Institute of Oncology Ljubljana

“With this brochure, lack of information can no longer be an excuse not to protect our children from HPV infection. Because there is more than just twisted ankles, childhood colds or bruised knees in the world.”

Tadeja Kahrmanović, mother

“Superbly written. The scientific facts about the serious consequences of the very dangerous HPV virus are presented in a witty and interesting way.”

Denis Baš, MD, Specialist in Paediatrics, President of the Primary Paediatrics Section of the Slovenian Medical Association

“As a hypochondriac, I have certainly had all the diseases in this world, including cervical cancer. That is why I support the HPV vaccine, because I trust and believe in science, in medicine... in short, in the people who are real experts in their fields.”

Tilen Artač, comedian and musician



THE ASSOCIATION OF SLOVENIAN
CANCER SOCIETIES



PERCH
PartnERship to
Contrast HPV