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Vaccine Unlikely Cause of Death

By JEANNE WHALEN

British health officials said that GlaxoSmithKline PLC's cervical cancer vaccine was "most unlikely" to have caused the death of a 14-year-old schoolgirl who died after receiving it Monday.

An autopsy of the girl has revealed that she had a "serious underlying medical condition which was likely to have caused death," an official of the National Health Service in Coventry, England, said in a statement Tuesday evening.

"We are awaiting further test results which will take some time. However, indications are that it was most unlikely that the HPV vaccination was the cause of death," the statement said.

The girl's death had caused concern in Britain, where a national immunization program with the vaccine, Cervarix, is underway in schoolgirls.

The vaccine is designed to protect against two strains of human papillomavirus, or HPV, a common sexually transmitted virus that can cause cervical cancer. Cervarix is approved for use in Europe but not yet in the U.S. On Tuesday, Glaxo said the Food and Drug Administration had delayed making a decision on whether to approve Cervarix for sale.

The FDA was scheduled to decide by Tuesday, but told Glaxo it would miss the deadline, Glaxo said.

Glaxo spokeswoman Sarah Alspach said the FDA didn't indicate that the death of the British girl was a factor in the agency's delay.

Glaxo said that more than 1.4 million doses of Cervarix have been given as part of the U.K.'s national immunization program.

The vaccine is approved for sale in almost 100 countries outside of the U.S.

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