FONDAZIONE BRUNO KESSLER
MAGAZINE

Also Adults at Risk for Measles. 3 Million between 15 and 40 Years Old Unprotected in Italy

August 22, 2017

It has been shown by the study conducted by Fondazione Bruno Kessler and Bocconi University published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases. Since the early 1980s, the vaccine has added to Italians a total of about one million years of life.

Vaccination of pre-school and school aged children may not be enough to ensure the full health protection of the Italian population against measles in the coming years. 56% of the measles cases reported in our country since the beginning of 2017 concern individuals in the 15 to 39 year-old age group, another 18% affects subjects between the ages of 40 and 64. In the future, the country's demographic evolution will make the phenomenon even more evident: measles will affect an older adult population.

This is one of the findings in the "Measles Immunity Gaps and the Progress Towards Elimination: Multi-Country Modeling Analysis" study published this month in the journal **The Lancet Infectious Diseases** on which researchers from **Fondazione Bruno Kessler** in Trento have worked in collaboration with **Bocconi University** in **Milan**.

The authors, **Filippo Trentini**, **Piero Poletti**, **Stefano Merler** and **Alessia Melegaro**, have built a model to describe the epidemiological trends of measles in nine countries, all of which have a wide variety of characters: Australia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ireland, Italy, South Korea, Singapore, United Kingdom, United States.

The study expands an approach developed by FBK researchers that shows how measles spread dynamics strongly depend on the country's socio-demographic characteristics besides its vaccination policies.

"As for our country," explains **Stefano Merler**, Head of the DPCS (Dynamic Processes in Complex Societies) research Unit at FBK, "the study shows that from the early 1980s the measles vaccine has added a total of about one million years of life to Italians thanks to the fact that the

disease and Its complications have been avoided. However, the combined effect of under-immunization and aging of the population poses a serious risk to the goal of getting rid of measles in Italy. To prevent measles, we need a 95% vaccine coverage. In Italy we are at about 85%. The low vaccine coverage obtained in the past and the absence of strategies to cover the adult age groups will end up weighing particularly in our country, where already the average age of those who contract measles, about 25 years old, is twice as high when compared to that of the United Kingdom. ”

“The Italian national plan for the elimination of measles”, **Piero Poletti**, a researcher with FBK’s DPCS Unit points out, “aimed at stopping the spread of the infection in our country by the end of 2015. However, over the last ten years measles have continued to circulate in Italy, affecting more and more teenagers and adults. All efforts to increase vaccine coverage in children are necessary to prevent the number of new people susceptible to the disease from growing. According to our estimates, however, there are about 3 million people between the ages of 15 and 40 who are not protected against measles in Italy today: a high enough susceptibility pool to support the transmission of measles for the next few decades and to cause new measles epidemics, similar to the one that has affected our country in recent months. ”

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