

Rubella and Measles, a continuing problem..

Measles and Rubella are two viral diseases with a similar clinical picture that can be prevented successfully by vaccination. Although both infections were controlled effectively by the Rubella and Measles vaccination programme in Sri Lanka, an increase in the incidence was observed during the last 2 years as evidenced by laboratory data.

Although these diseases are preventable, in developing countries like Sri Lanka they can give rise to outbreaks and lead to severe complications in infected individuals. Complications of Measles are blindness, encephalitis, malnutrition and death. Rubella infection during pregnancy can lead to severe congenital malformations of the baby.

In 2010 and 2011 several outbreaks were reported in Sri Lanka from military camps, garment factories and universities. Most of the infected individuals were young adults. The reason for this could be lack of immunity against Measles and Rubella in this age group.

Diagnostic tests for these viruses are performed at the Measles and Rubella laboratory at Medical Research Institute. Under the guidance of World Health Organization (WHO), techniques to identify both Measles and Rubella viruses up to the genotype level are established at MRI. The necessary equipments and the trained technical officers are present at our institution.

In addition to issuing reports to patients, data is forwarded to the Global Measles / and Rubella programme. This is very important for implementing strategies for control and prevention of these two viruses.

Due to the recent dilemma regarding vaccination for Rubella most people were reluctant to get their children vaccinated. This could be a main reason for decline in immunity towards Rubella.

Improving the compliance of vaccination by educating the public and identifying infections early are important steps that have to be taken in order to eradicate measles and Rubella from our country. This is a task that has to be taken seriously by all of us.