

## UGM Expert: Measles-Rubella Immunization is Important

Friday, 21 September 2018 WIB, By: Marwati




Lecturer of UGM Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing, dr. Mei Neni Sitaresmi, Sp.A(K), Ph.D., communicated the importance of measles-rubella vaccination in response to the prevalence of the two diseases in Indonesia.

“Measles and rubella are serious diseases and still prevalent in Indonesia,” explained Neni when contacted on Thursday (9/20) evening.

Measles infection, she said, can lead to pneumonia, brain inflammation, and even death in infants. On the other hand, rubella exposure in pregnant women can result in birth defects.

Rubella is a mild disease in children that usually gets better on its own. However, infection during the first trimester of pregnancy can cause serious damage. It may cause infants to be born with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS), indicated by small head size, hearing loss, eye, and heart defects.

“This will certainly be a heavy burden on babies with CRS,” said Neni, a member of Indonesian



Pediatric Association's immunization task force.

Immunization with MR vaccine, Neni said, is the best preventive measure to minimize transmission of both measles and rubella.

"The only way to prevent these two diseases is MR vaccines," asserted the Vice Dean for Cooperation, Alumni, and Community Service.

MR immunization is given to children in the age group of 9 months to 15 years. Not only intended to protect vaccinated people, it also provides herd immunity against measles and rubella. To achieve this, 95 percent of the population have to be immune, thereby reducing viral transmission.

"Low immunization coverage at 85 percent, for instance, may cause an outbreak due to lack of herd immunity."

The current immunization coverage in Indonesia is still low. This is partly caused by the issues of halal vaccine and rejection in some areas.

"Indonesia's Islamic Council has issued a religious edict that vaccination is permissible because of emergency, so parents are advised to give MR vaccines to their children."

She urged the community, especially parents, not to be selfish in making decisions on MR vaccines, because measles and rubella are contagious diseases and they cause severe complications.

"MR vaccine is completely safe. Although low fever may occur after vaccination, it can be cured immediately with fever reducers," explained the head of Yogyakarta Committee on Adverse Event Following Immunization.

However, she added, the vaccine is not safe for patients with low immune systems, including patients of leukemia and those receiving steroid therapy.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Law lecturer at UGM Faculty of Law, Dr. Yulkarnain Harahab, S.H., M.Si., stated that although MR vaccine contains pig enzymes, its use was permitted under certain conditions or emergency.

It has been explained in the Quran which says that it is unlawful to eat carcasses and forbidden animals, including pig, but is permissible in emergencies.

The Quran, he said, was the basis for the Indonesian Ulema Council to issue a religious edict stipulating that MR vaccine is permitted to use despite containing materials from pigs.

“The vaccine can be used in emergencies because there is no other alternative to prevent the impacts of non-vaccination,” explained Yulkarnain at UGM Faculty of Law.

According to the lecturer, the principle of Islamic Law is to promote human welfare such as by maintaining or providing protection. It corresponds with the purpose of administering vaccine injections to form immunity.

“Vaccine administration agrees with the nature of Islamic Law in terms of providing protection,” he said.

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