Dual vaccine to address rubella threat



Grace Melia Kristanto, a 26year old blogger, was elated when her first daughter, Aubrey Naiym Kaya cinta, was born in May 2012.

As a mother, she tried to bond with Aubrey through communication. But no matter how hardshe clapped her hands or how loudly she spoke, Aubrey did not respond.

Later, Grace discovered she had had Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) when pregnant, causing Aubrey to suffer from hearing and heart problems as well as cognitive and motoric development issues.

"Now she has turned fouranda half years old. She still has to wear hearing aids and go through therapy six days a week because her hearing loss is profound. Her motor skills are also lagging behind and she's still learning how to stand," Grace told The Jakarta Post.

Grace lamented that the CRS was not detected early, citing a lack of information and awareness about the illness, even among medical practitioners, despite the fact that there were 108 cases of rubella in 2015.

"For instance, when I went to see doctors, with symptoms of rubella such as a skin rash, none of them said it was rubella," she said. "Most people in Indonesia don't know that rubella can infect pregnant women as well. They are still focused on is sues like autism, cancer and breast feeding.

"Rubella, also known as German measles, is a contagious but often mild viral infection. While generally mild in children, it can have serious consequences in pregnant women, leading to fetal death or congenital defects, known as CRS.

"It's just like Zika. The defects can vary, such as sight loss, hearing loss, brain defects and so on," said
the Health Ministry's surveillance and quarantine director, Elizabeth Jane Soepardi.

The virus is transmitted by air
borne droplets from the sneeze orcough of an infected person. World wide, over 100,000 babies are born
with CRS every year.

Currently, there is no specific treatment for rubella but the illness can be prevented with vaccination.

Therefore, the government plans to introduce rubella vaccinations through the national

immunization program, in what would be largest ever campaign against the illness.
"We don't want our children tobe like that. The only way to prevent that is to change our current vaccines, which only prevent measles, to those that prevent both measles and rubella," Jane said.
Currently, measles vaccinationis mandatory for all children. Themanufacturer of the measles vaccine, stateowned pharmaceutical company Bio Farma, will cooperate with the Serum Institute of India (SII), which produces a rubella vaccine, so that a combined measlesrubella (MR) vaccine can be administered to children in a single injection.
The rollout of the vaccine in Indonesia will begin in 2017 and will target 70 million children below 15 years old, the largest number of children to be vaccinated for rubella in the world.
"This is the world's largest MR campaign as 70 million girls and boys will be vaccinated. We're looking forward to the success of the campaign," Global Alliances for Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI) deputy CEO Anuradha Gupta said.
With the help of funding from GAVI, the government plans to eradicate pockets of rubella infections across the country.
"There are 183 regencies with low measles vaccination rates. We will target these regencies in Java from August to September 2017. And in the same period in 2018, we will target those outside Java," Jane said.
After that, the government will only vaccinate children aged 9 months, 2 years and 7 years countrywide, starting in 2018.
The plan is part of South east Asian countries' commitment to eliminating measles and controlling rubella and CRS by 2020, as stated by the World Health Organization Southeast Many pregnant women unaware rubella can lead to birth defects Government to administer measlesrubella vaccine to 70 million children Asia region.
The WHO estimates that US$800 million is needed to achieve the goal.
Source : The Jakarta Post