Reviewer’s report

Title: Varicella: epidemiological aspects and vaccination coverage in Veneto Region.

Version: 1 Date: 17 June 2009

Reviewer: Paolo Durando

Reviewer’s report:

In this paper, Baldo and colleagues describe (i) the epidemiology of varicella disease in Veneto, Italy, from 2000 to 2007, and (ii) the universal childhood immunization program against this important infectious disease started up, on a regional basis, during the year 2005. Even if part of the provided data on the immunization campaign in Veneto had been previously published by the same research group (Baldo V et al., Eurosurveillance 2007;12(44):pii=3299) and detailed epidemiological findings concerning varicella spread in Italy are available, collected on a national basis, in the recent literature (Gabutti G et al. BMC Public Health 2008;8:372), the present paper updates both these items in a large area in the North of Italy, providing evidence for a wide and well organized public health primary preventive intervention.

Major Compulsory Revisions
None.

Minor Essential Revisions

The authors’ affiliation n. 2 reported in the first page of the manuscript should be appropriately translated.

In the Abstract, Authors should clearly report (i) in the section Background, which varicella immunization strategy the Veneto Region has decided to adopt (active and free of charge universal vaccination of children at 14 months of age and of 12 year old adolescents with a negative history for varicella) and (ii) in the section Methods, the methodology used to calculate the so called “Corrected coverage rates”.

The sentence “Infants, adolescents and immunocompromised people are at higher risk”, reported in the first paragraph, at pag. 4, of the section Background, need to be supported by the appropriate reference.

All the acronyms in the text need to be reported in extenso when cited for the first time.

Authors should explain in more details the methods used “To estimate the
number of solicited children” (Section Methods, at pag. 7, second paragraph).
Authors should check the punctuation marks of the first sentence of the paragraph 2, at pag. 7, in the section Results.
In the first two paragraphs of pag. 8, section Results, Authors should report both the adherence rates and the corrected coverage rates making reference preferably to the birth cohort than to the year of monitoring.
Authors should change the last sentence of the section Results, third paragraph, at pag. 8, into “In 2007, protected subjects represented nearly 70.0% of the targeted cohort (range 51.5- 85.2%), being MMRV and monovalent varicella vaccine almost equally administered among vaccinees.”
In the first paragraph of pag. 10, section Discussion and Conclusions, Authors should change “12 months” with “14 months”, as previously reported in the text.
Authors need to check the References reported in the manuscript. In particular:
- reference 1 does not support the contention of the text.
- references 5 and 18 regard the up-dated ACIP recommendations for the prevention of varicella in the US: nevertheless, also the Regional Council Resolutions from Veneto need to be reported in the manuscript.
- all the web links reported in the text need to be correctly included in the reference list.
Titles of Figures 1 and 2 should clearly indicate that data presented concern the “monthly” incidence rate per 1000 population. Furthermore, in Figure 1, Authors need to explain in more details to what the line reported in the same Figure is referred.
In Table 2, acronyms should be reported as previous in the text (i.e., MMR and MMRV).
Discretionary Revisions
Please, consider “monovalent varicella vaccine” instead of “single antigen vaccine” (Section Methods, at pag. 6, third paragraph).
Figures 3 and 4 could preferably be deleted, reporting related data directly in the text.
The Discussion does not always sound fluent and, particularly, it is repetitive in some periods, i.e., where the benefits of the varicella immunization programs are mentioned as the most useful preventive strategy for an optimal control of the disease, as resulting from other international experiences. For this reason, this part of the manuscript would benefit from a reassessment.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests.