

A public health collaboration between medical professionals and Japan's professional football league for rubella awareness

To the Editor,

Japan experienced a nationwide outbreak of rubella between 2012 and 2013, resulting in 17 000 cases of rubella and 45 cases of congenital rubella syndrome.¹ In the latest outbreak between 2018 and 2019, 5252 cases of rubella and 5 cases of congenital rubella syndrome were reported.² Most cases were adult males (78%), typically between 40 and 57 years old, who had not received routine rubella vaccination during childhood due to a cessation of the mandatory national vaccination program between 1977 and 1995. In response to the recent outbreak, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) launched additional policies in April 2019 providing free rubella antibody testing for men in the high-risk age cohort and, if necessary, free vaccinations for those with low antibody levels. This countermeasure is a 3-year program aimed at increasing the population prevalence of rubella antibodies to >85% by July 2020, and eventually to increase levels to 90% by March 2022.³

However, as of 30 September 2019, the use of free rubella antibody testing remained quite low at less than 13%.⁴ As such, our team collaborated with Japan's professional football league (J.League) to increase rubella awareness. The average age of J.League spectators is 42.8 years old and is comprised of mainly men in their 40s (26.9%), 50s (20.5 %) and 30s (16.8 %).⁵ To access this at-risk population, we held a free rubella antibody testing event for football spectators before an official match (FUJI XEROX SUPER CUP 2020 on 8 February 2020). In addition, prominent Japanese soccer players conducted rubella awareness activities in advance of the game through social networking platforms and print media. On the day of the event, we provided free rubella antibody tests as well as rubella awareness activities in front of the football venue (Figure 1). In total, 89 adult spectators underwent rubella antibody testing.

We believe that antibody testing by medical professionals on the sidelines of sports events may be a useful strategy to access at-risk populations who have little public health knowledge of rubella or ready access to antibody testing. We look forward to sharing a full report of this important public health intervention when the data become available.



FIGURE 1 Spectators line up to be tested for rubella antibodies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to thank Shoji Fujimura, General Manager of Research & Study, Japan Professional Football League, for his kind support.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This event was funded by LINK-J SCOOP 2019 and ANA Wonder FLY.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Author TN was supported by research funding by LINK-J SCOOP 2019 (200 thousand yen) and ANA Wonder FLY (372 thousand yen).

Toshinori Nishizawa MD¹ 

Yuko Murashima MD¹

Yuichi Nakamura MD¹

Keigo Sugisawa MD²

Hironobu Nishiori MD³

Kengo Nakamura MD⁴

Noriyuki Amano MD⁵

Gautam A. Deshpande MA, MD^{1,6}

Hiroko Arioka MD¹

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2020 The Authors. *Journal of General and Family Medicine* published by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd on behalf of Japan Primary Care Association.

¹*Division of General Internal Medicine, St. Luke's International Hospital, Tokyo, Japan*

²*Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Science, Tokyo Medical and Dental University, Tokyo, Japan*

³*Department of Cardiovascular Surgery, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan*

⁴*Department of Internal Medicine, Saitama City Hospital, Saitama, Japan*

⁵*Amano Clinic, Saitama, Japan*

⁶*Department of General Medicine, Juntendo University, Tokyo, Japan*

Correspondence

Toshinori Nishizawa, Division of General Internal Medicine, St. Luke's International Hospital, 9-1, Akashi-cho, Chuo City, Tokyo 104-8560, Japan.

Email: nishizawa.toshinori@gmail.com

ORCID

Toshinori Nishizawa  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2074-646X>

REFERENCES

1. Ujiie M, Nabae K, Shobayashi T. Rubella outbreak in Japan. *Lancet*. 2014;383:1460–61.
2. NIID (National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Japan). Infectious Diseases Weekly Report 2020: Prompt Report of Rubella. (cited 22, April 2020) Available from <https://www.niid.go.jp/niid//images/idsc/disease/rubella/2020pdf/rube20-16.pdf>
3. Ujiie M. Rubella resurgence in Japan 2018–2019. *J Travel Med*. 2019;26(6):2018–9.
4. MHLW (the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare). How to implement additional measures for wind chills in the future. (cited 28 November 2019) Available from https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/shingi/shingi-kousei_127717.html
5. Japan Professional Football League (J.League). J. League TM Fun Survey 2019 SUMMARY REPORT. (cited 31 January 2020) Available from <https://www.jleague.jp/docs/aboutj/funsurvey-2019.pdf>