

## A new national surveillance system for under 2 year-old children

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### Background

Recently, the WHO has emphasized the importance of the early childhood as an important period in which to build solid bases for future physical and psychological development (1, 2). Indeed, scientific evidence highlights the crucial role played by the prenatal period and by the first years of life in promoting a healthy psychophysical development and in reducing health inequalities (3, 4).

For these reasons, given the experience gained in our country with other population surveillance systems, the Ministry of Health/CCM funded a new health determinants surveillance system for under 2 years-old children, entrusting its coordination to the National Institute of Health.

### Materials and Methods

Currently, 12 Italian regions are involved in the new national surveillance system, but all regions have been invited to participate. Following a pilot project (5), which tested the feasibility and sustainability of the system, vaccination services have been identified for intercepting and selecting children and for interviewing their mothers. The surveillance system involves health professionals, working in these services, who have been specially trained on the investigated determinants of health and on the methodological aspects of the surveillance system.

The surveillance also disseminates informative material to parents, offering them the opportunity to get more information and support for parenthood from the health care staff.

### Results

It is intended to cover the lack of information existing in Italy from preconception period to the second birthday of the children. The surveillance will produce prevalence estimates concerning the following health determinants: folic acid assumption, tobacco and alcohol consumption during pregnancy and lactation, cradle position, parents' plan to vaccinate their children, use of the children car seat, parents' attitudes to reading to their children, domestic accidents and use of tablet/mobile phones/TV by children. In addition, it can simultaneously collect information on socio-demographic factors that contribute to the study of the multidimensional complexity of behaviors that may influence children's health.

### Conclusion

Surveillance systems play an important role in public health (6). This new surveillance, in addition to gathering useful data currently unavailable, will provide a sound basis to define indicators for the regional prevention plans and to orient regions in planning interventions for prevention and the promotion of health of the child and his/her parents.

*Keywords: children, health determinants, vaccination services*

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