

Rubella And Rabies Vaccines Offer Hope Around The World

The Wistar Institute



In 1963 and 1964, a rubella pandemic took its toll in the United States and Europe. As a result, nearly 12,000 babies were born either deaf or deaf and blind. But due to the efforts of researchers at The Wistar Institute, a non-profit biomedical institute in Philadelphia, a rubella vaccine was introduced in 1969. In the years since, rubella has been virtually eliminated in developed countries.

In the 1960s, Wistar Institute scientists also developed the highly effective Pitman-Moore rabies vaccine, which helps prevent rabies infections in individuals who have been bitten by a rabid animal. The research underlying both the rabies and rubella vaccines was funded by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

But rubella and rabies still pose significant health threats in other parts of the world.

“ In developing countries, congenital rubella syndrome, resulting from rubella infections during pregnancy, still accounts for untold birth defects and nearly 700,000 deaths per year.

The World Health Organization reports that rabies is the tenth most common cause of death stemming from an infectious agent. In fact, more than 90 percent of all rabies fatalities occur in Asia, and every year approximately 30,000 rabies-related deaths occur in India alone.

In response, Wistar has licensed vaccines for rabies and rubella to companies in China, India and Russia. In order to encourage the production and distribution of these vaccines, the terms of the licensing agreements with these companies are well below market rates. This will enable the companies to develop low-cost vaccines for local use.

Wistar has completed six public health licenses for rubella and rabies vaccines from 1999 to the present. It continues to work with groups in developing countries that want to produce inexpensive vaccines for regional distribution.

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