

# Congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy *News*



## Congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy surveillance report

**Rubella and congenital rubella syndrome elimination** in the European Region of the World Health Organization (WHO-EURO) is included among the objectives of the “European Vaccine Action Plan 2015-2020”.

In Italy a national surveillance system of congenital rubella and rubella infections in pregnancy is active since 2005 in order to monitor progress toward elimination.

This report shows national and regional surveillance data for the period **January 2005 - February 2018**. Reclassification of some cases due to updated information may be responsible for minor variation of data respect to the previous bulletins.

## Highlights

- In **2017** two confirmed congenital rubella cases (one imported and one of unknown origin) and one indigenous confirmed case of rubella in pregnancy were reported.
- In the first two months of **2018** an imported confirmed congenital rubella infection was reported.
- Congenital rubella incidence is **below 1 case per 100,000 live births since 2013**. It is, however, necessary to keep high the attention, taking into consideration that rubella infection has a cyclic-epidemic trend.
- It is necessary to reinforce the follow up of the **outcome of pregnancies** and of the **status of infection of the newborns** with suspected congenital rubella over time.

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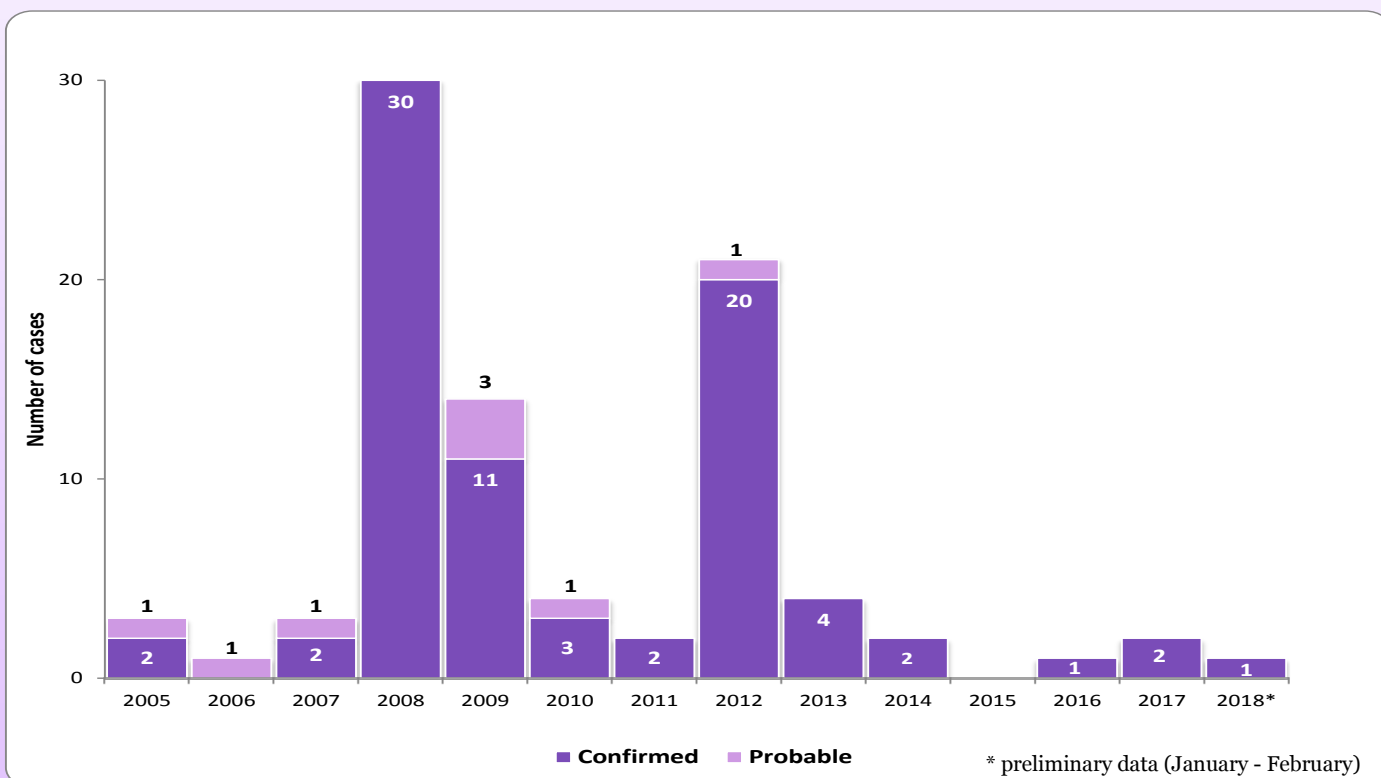
## Congenital rubella: national data

In the period **January 2005 – February 2018**, **88** cases of congenital rubella were reported: **80 confirmed** and **8 probable** cases according to European Commission case definition.

Figure 1 shows the number of congenital infections (confirmed and probable cases) by year and classification. We can observe a peak of notifications in 2008 (30 cases, with an incidence of 5.2 per 100,000 live births) and one in 2012 (21 cases, with an incidence of 3.9 per 100,000 live births).

In the first few months of **2018**, one confirmed imported congenital rubella infection was reported.

**Figure 1.** Congenital rubella infections by year and classification. Italy, January 2005– February 2018



### Clinical information

Information on clinical manifestations are available for **82** of the 88 probable/confirmed reported cases. At least one clinical manifestation was reported for 65 cases. The most frequently reported symptoms/sign were:

- Congenital heart disease (44 children)
- Loss of hearing (31 children)
- Cataract (13 children)
- Meningoencephalitis (12 children)
- Microcephaly (11 children)

**Twenty-two** cases had multiple defects involving the heart, hearing or vision.

**Seventeen** infants were asymptomatic: they are cases with laboratory confirmation and epidemiological link.

## Rubella in pregnancy: national data

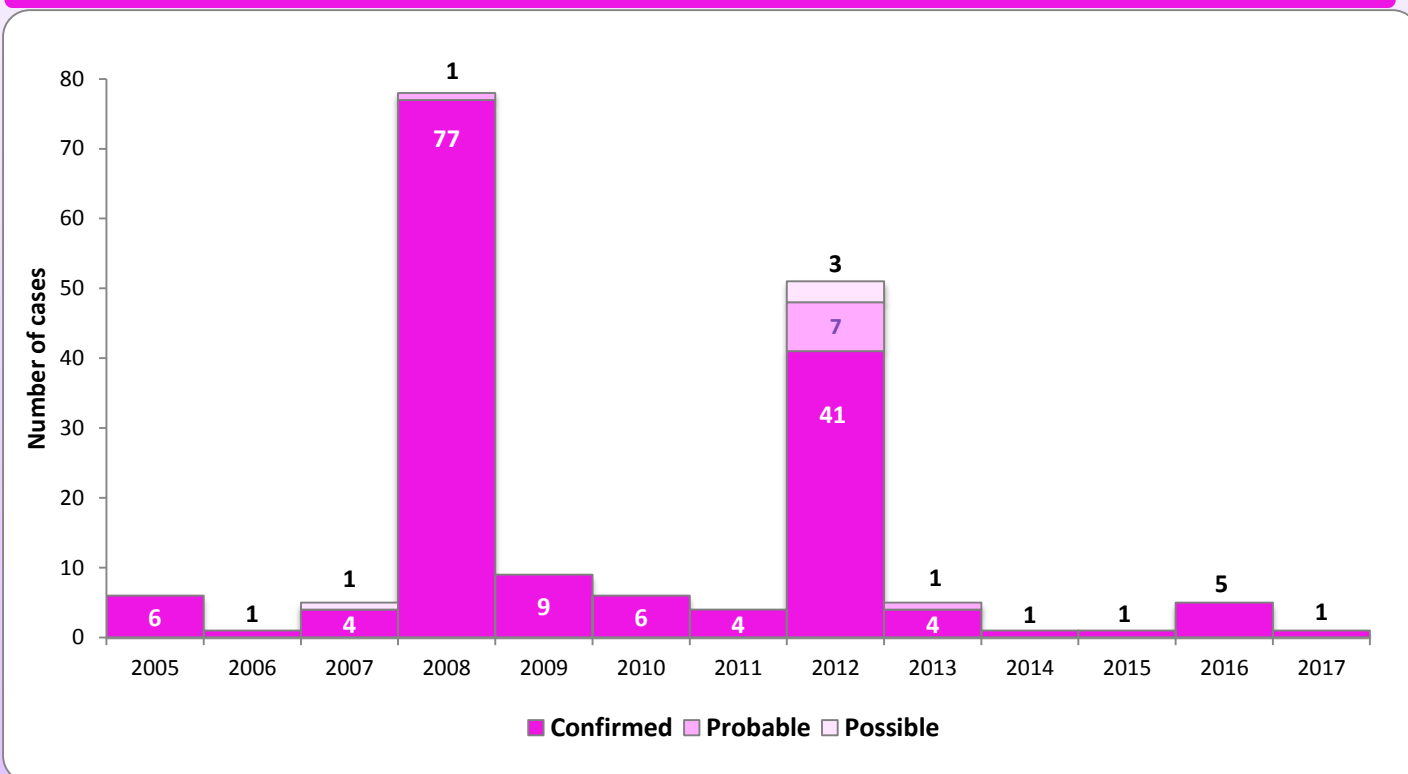
In the period **January 2005 – February 2018**, **173** cases of rubella in pregnancy (**160 confirmed, 9 probable and 4 possible cases**) were reported.

In the same period, among the infected women, **one stillbirth, one spontaneous abortion and 32 voluntary terminations** were reported.

The Figure 2 reports the number of rubella infections in pregnancy (confirmed, probable and possible cases) by year and case classification. We can observe a peak of notifications in 2008 (78 cases) and one in 2012 (51 cases). This temporal trend is consistent with that reported for congenital rubella in the Figure 1.

In the first few months of **2018**, no rubella infection in pregnancy was reported.

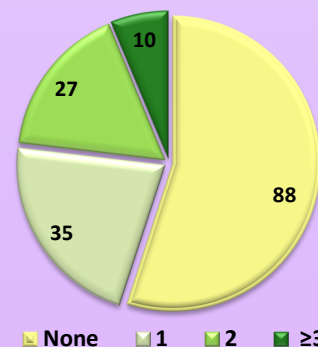
**Figure 2.** Rubella in pregnancy by year and classification, Italy, January 2005– December 2017



### Characteristics of women with rubella infection in pregnancy

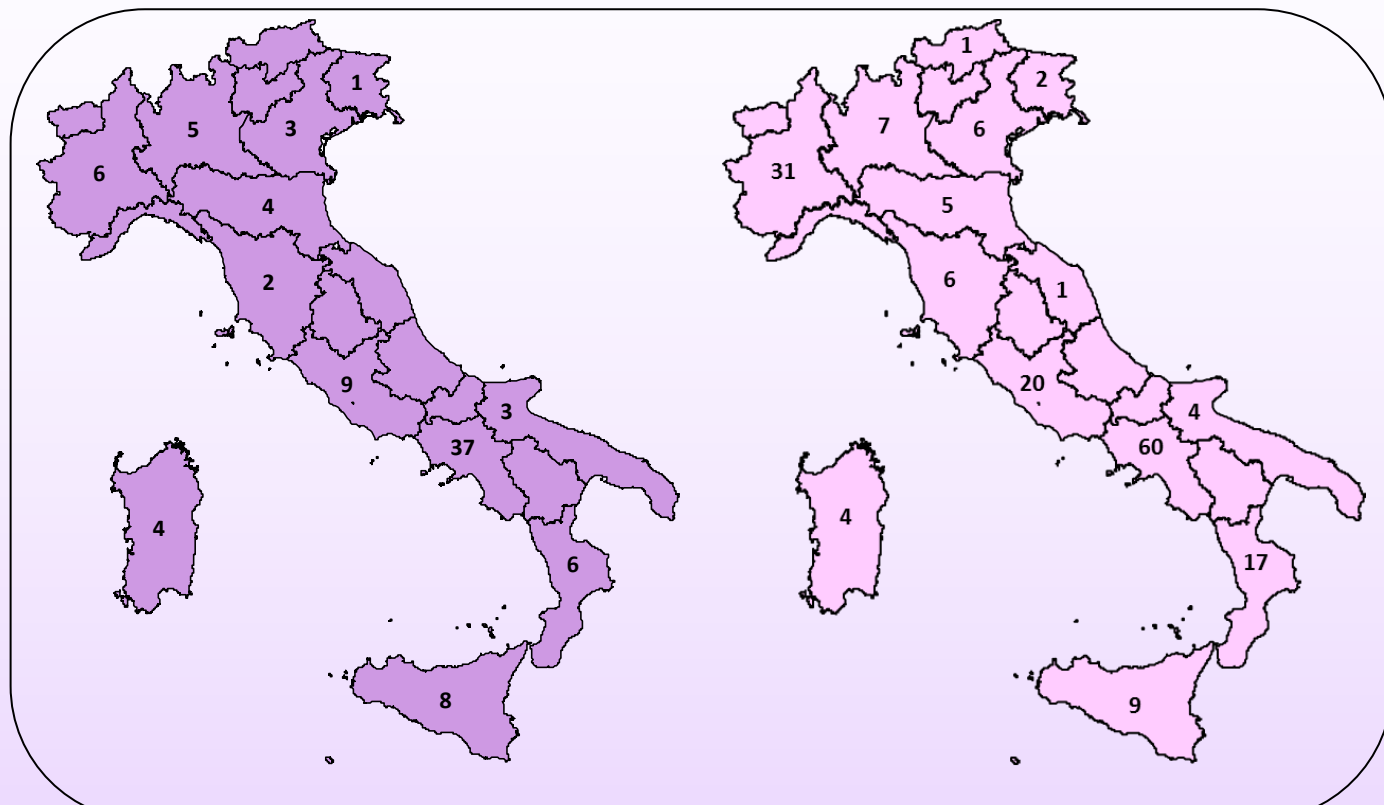
(confirmed, probable and possible cases)

- The median age is 27 years
- 17% (28/167) is not Italian
- 41% (48/117) acquired the infection in the first trimester of pregnancy
- Only 29% (38/133) performed the rubella antibody screening before pregnancy
- 45% (72/160) had previous pregnancies (Figure 3)
- Three women reported to be vaccinated (but the vaccination history is not documented)
- For 40 women (23%) it is unknown if the infection was transmitted to the newborn, because the outcome of the pregnancy is unknown or because information regarding the status of infection of the newborn was not available.



**Figure 3.** N. previous pregnancies in infected women

## Congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy: regional data



**Figure 4.** Confirmed and probable congenital rubella cases by Region/A.P., January 2005 - February 2018

**Figure 5.** Rubella in pregnancy cases (confirmed, probable and possible cases) by Region/A.P., January 2005 - February 2018

## Congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy: Focus 2017 - 2018

In **2017** two confirmed congenital rubella cases and one confirmed case of rubella in pregnancy were reported. Specifically these are:

- one confirmed congenital rubella syndrome, in a child born from a Nigerian refugee living in a reception centre for migrants. The newborn, at birth, had patent ductus arteriosus, ventricular septal defect, splenomegaly, purpura, meningoencephalitis and brain cysts. The available information do not allow to define if the woman has acquired the infection before or after her arrival in Italy.
- an asymptomatic imported confirmed congenital rubella infection, in a child born from a Nigerian refugee, living in a reception center for migrants.
- a rubella infection in pregnancy in a Filipino unvaccinated nulliparous woman, diagnosed at the sixth week of gestation; the outcome of pregnancy is not known.

In the same year two suspected rubella infections were reported in two babies born from Nigerian refugees with confirmed rubella in pregnancy: in one case the congenital infection was excluded after the follow up of the newborn; it was not possible to classify the other case with the available information: however, the diagnostic tests carried out during the prenatal age had not shown signs of infection of the fetus and the child at the birth did not show signs/symptoms compatible with congenital rubella.

In the first two months of **2018** an imported confirmed congenital rubella infection was notified, in a child born from a Nigerian refugee living in a reception center (follow up ongoing).

Since 2016, most of congenital rubella reported infections occurred in babies born from women living in reception centers; it is recommended to promote vaccination of hard-to-reach groups, including the migrant population.



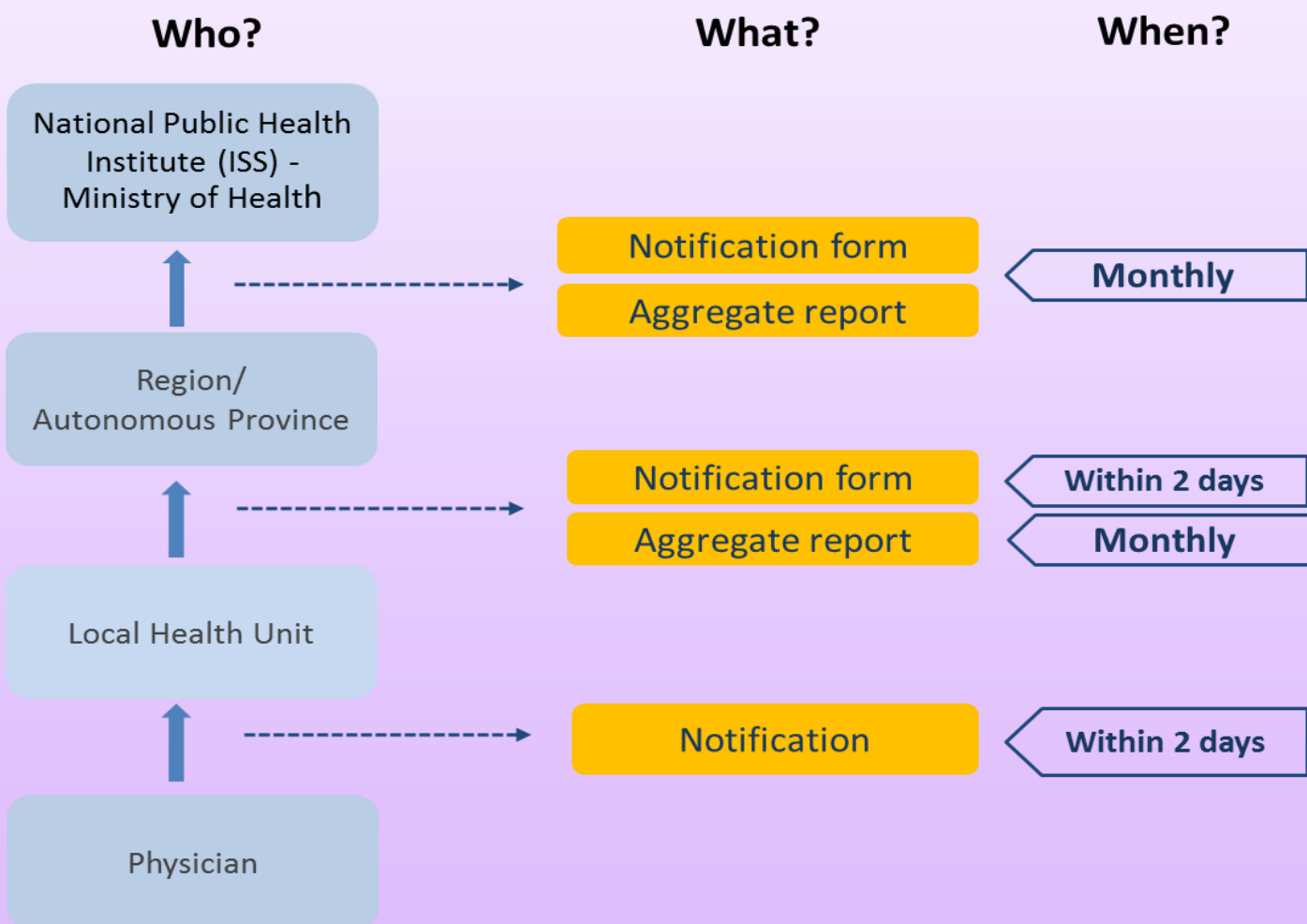
# The surveillance system for congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy

In Italy the notification of congenital rubella syndrome, congenital rubella infections and rubella infections in pregnancy is mandatory since the 1st of January 2005.

The national surveillance system for congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy is mandatory, passive, case-based and based on clinicians.

Two separate notification forms are used for congenital rubella and rubella infections in pregnancy; the notification form for congenital rubella also includes a section regarding the mother's history.

Data flow is described below.





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# To improve the surveillance...

- Improving the sensitivity and specificity of the surveillance system is important to monitor progresses towards elimination.
- An annual/biannual crosscheck between notifications and hospital records with 771.0 discharge code should allow to detect congenital rubella cases not reported to the surveillance system.
- Clinicians' awareness on the importance of reporting all cases to the surveillance system should be arisen.
- Strengthening the surveillance of pregnant women with suspected rubella infection is fundamental because it is an entry point for congenital rubella cases. Early diagnosis of congenital rubella cases also allows quick interventions for any associated defect and prevention of rubella spread from infected infants.
- Monitoring of infected pregnant women is also important to record all the outcomes of the pregnancy, including stillbirth, spontaneous and voluntary terminations, that contribute to assess the burden of congenital rubella.
- It is important that all the babies born from mothers with possible, probable and confirmed infection in pregnancy are followed up over time with laboratory, clinical and diagnostic investigations, in order to confirm or exclude the congenital infection and correctly classify the cases as infection or syndrome. It is necessary to improve the timeliness of the collection of clinical information and laboratory results and their completeness, in order to reduce the amount of cases that cannot be classified.
- A monthly report of congenital infections and infections in pregnancy, including zero-reporting, is needed to improve the sensitivity and the timeliness of the surveillance system.

## Useful links...

- 2012 European Commission case definitions for rubella and congenital rubella: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:262:0001:0057:EN:PDF>
- Italian Ministry of Health. National Plan for the elimination of measles and congenital rubella 2010-2015. [http://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C\\_17\\_pubblicazioni\\_1519\\_allegato.pdf](http://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_1519_allegato.pdf) (in Italian)
- Italian Ministry of Health. "Surveillance of congenital rubella and rubella infection in pregnancy according to the new National Plan for measles and congenital rubella elimination 2010-2015" del 17 Luglio 2013: <http://www.trovanorme.salute.gov.it/norme/renderNormsanPdf?anno=0&codLeg=46583&parte=1%20&serie=> (in Italian)
- Morbillo & Rosolia News: the monthly bulletin of the integrated measles and rubella surveillance: <http://www.epicentro.iss.it/problemi/morbillo/bollettino.asp> (in Italian)
- Scientific publication: "Congenital rubella still a public health problem in Italy: analysis of national surveillance data from 2005 to 2013" Euro Surveill. 2015;20(16):pii=21103: <http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=21103>
- Scientific publication: "Surveillance of congenital rubella and rubella infections in pregnancy in EU/EEA countries, 2012: Current status and future perspective to monitor elimination." Vaccine 2015; 33(38): 4929–4937
- Scientific publication: "Underreporting of congenital rubella in Italy, 2010-2014." EJP 2017; 176(7):955-962
- Scientific publication: "Comparison of rubella immunization rates in immigrant and Italian women of childbearing age: Results from the Italian behavioral surveillance system PASSI (2011-2015)." PLoS One. 2017 Oct 2;12(10):e0178122

*This report was produced by: Cristina Giambi, Martina Del Manso, Antonino Bella, Antonietta Filia, Maria Cristina Rota and thanks to the precious contribution of the Ministry of Health, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, Local Health Units and diagnosis laboratories.*

*Regional representatives for congenital rubella and rubella in pregnancy: Di Giacomo M (Abruzzo); Cauzillo G (Basilicata); Natter B (PA Bolzano); Mignuoli A (Calabria); De Gaetano A (Campania); Pascucci MG, Moschella L, Frasca G (Emilia-Romagna); Gallo T, Braida C (Friuli Venezia Giulia); Scognamiglio P (Lazio); Carloni R (Liguria); Gramegna M, Rosa AM (Lombardia); Fiacchini D, Damiani N (Marche); Ponzio GV, Bagnoli C (Molise); Ferrara L, Giovanetti F (Piemonte); Prato R, Cappelli MG (Puglia); Palmas MA, Macis F, Cadau P (Sardegna); Palermo M (Sicilia); Balocchini E, Gallicchio S, Pecori L (Toscana); Carraro V, Zuccali MG (PA Trento); Ruffier M (Valle d'Aosta); Napoletano A, Zanella R (Veneto); Tosti A (Umbria).*

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