

Abstract

Study of the Epidemiology of Hepatitis A Virus Infection in the Jamaican Population

M.G. Brown

Hepatitis A virus (HAV), is an RNA virus in the picornavirus family. It is transmitted faecal-orally by contaminated food or drink. It has a worldwide distribution, and like other enteric infectious diseases it is typically an infection of childhood, related to conditions of crowding and poor hygiene. HAV causes only acute hepatitis and has never been associated with chronic liver disease such as seen with hepatitis B virus or hepatitis C virus. Infections with HAV may be prevented by improving levels of sanitation and hygiene and immunization with HAV vaccine.

Between January 1995 and August 1998, 339 individuals were recruited into the study of the epidemiology of HAV. Sera from the participants were tested for anti-HAV IgG using the Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) technique (Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Park, IL 60064). Social and demographic data were collected using questionnaires.

The age of the participants ranged from 3-90 years. There were 128 males and 211 females. The average age of males and females was 25 years. The seroprevalence of HAV in the population using ELISA was 59.9%. Age and source of water supply

were found to be the major contributors to exposure to HAV

The seroprevalence of HAV in Jamaica is higher than that seen generally in developed countries, although the age related acquisition was similar. Improved water supply, educating the public on the epidemiology of HAV and immunization in the preschool age children could reduce the prevalence of HAV in Jamaica.