

Sero prevalence of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) in pregnant women in Southeast Nigeria

Our objective was to determine the seroprevalence of hepatitis B surface antigen in pregnant women in Enugu, Nigeria. The study included 7581 women attending the booking clinic over a 5-year period (January 2000–December 2004). The overall prevalence for confirmed cases was 0.84% (64 out of 7581).

Introduction

Most studies on the prevalence of hepatitis B surface antigen (HbsAg) positives were done among blood donors,¹ with little research on the antenatal patients.

The high prevalence of HbsAg and hepatitis Be antigen (HbeAg) in pregnant women is considered the most important factor contributing to the higher carrier rate of HbsAg in some populations.²

The University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu introduced routine named screening of all pregnant women for HbsAg in the year 2000. The introduction of new services requires evaluation.³

Method

University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu conducts the booking clinic on Mondays and Fridays. Pregnant women who attended the clinic were counselled for screening of HbsAg among others tests like HIV screening, haemoglobin estimation, and venereal disease research laboratory.

Serum samples were collected from pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic during a 5-year period.

Serum samples were screened for HbsAg by enzyme-linked immuno-sorbent assay (ELISA). Other markers were not tested.

A detailed clinical history was elicited from all HbsAg positive pregnant women for the presence of factors such as blood transfusion, parental drug use and occupational exposure.

Results

A total of 7581 pregnant women were screened for HbsAg: only 64 (0.84%) were HbsAg positive, making the overall prevalence for confirmed cases to be 0.84% (64 out of 7581).

The majority of the affected women were between the ages of 25 and 29 years.

The occupation of the patients revealed that the majority were housewives plus one nurse who had no vaccination.

Associated risk factors were obtained from 42 of the 64 HbsAg positive women. They were as follows in descending order: previous injections in a patient medicine store (22, 52.4%), blood transfusion (13, 31.0%), and previous infective hepatitis (7, 16.6%).

There were 25 nulliparous women, 12 Para I, 8 Para 2, 8 Para 3, 5 Para 4 4 Para 5 and 2 Para 6. Mostly nulliparous women were HbsAg positive.

Conclusion

The seroprevalence of HbsAg in Nigeria women is 0.84%. However, vertical transmission is prevalent in our communities. It is worrying that the majority of the women only knew their status for the first time during antenatal testing.

There is a need to introduce routine antenatal screening of all pregnant women in order to institute appropriate intervention. Unless this is done, vertical and horizontal transmission of this disease will continue in developing countries such as Nigeria.

The cost of screening should be shared by the government and the pregnant patient.

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- 2 Al Mazrou YY, Al Je FFri M, Khalil Mk, *et al.* Screening of pregnant Saudi women for hepatitis B surface antigen. *Ann Saudi Med* 2004;**24**:265-9
- 3 Duffy TA, Wolfe CDA, Varden C, Kennedy S, Chrystie IL. Women's knowledge and attitude and acceptability of voluntary antenatal HIV testing. *Br J Obstet Gynaecol* 1988;**105**:849-54

Erratum

TROPICAL DOCTOR 2006; 36:128

Ersoy Y, Sonmez E, Tevfik MR, But AD. Comparison of three different combination therapies in the treatment of human brucellosis. *Trop Doct* 2005; **35**: 210-2

Please note that the affiliations were printed incorrectly – the correct affiliations are:

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Also note that the third author's first name should be Ayp̄e.

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