Response to Letter by: Al-Mendalawi et al.,

In response to the question raised by Prof. Al-Mendalawi about rotavirus immunization coverage in Lebanon, we would like to emphasize that the rotavirus vaccine is not incorporated in the routine immunization schedule; the vaccine is however available in the private clinics. Unfortunately, the anti-rotavirus immunity of patients included in our study has not been investigated. Our results are not different from those obtained in Europe. In France where rotavirus vaccination is not included in the routine immunization program, a recent study has reported that rotavirus was the cause of more than 50% of the total hospitalizations for gastroenteritis per year in a pediatric unit in Paris, followed by norovirus causing 8% of the total hospitalizations [1].

Despite the availability of rotavirus vaccine in several private clinics of North Lebanon, rotavirus continues to cause severe acute gastroenteritis in infants and young children. These observations highlight the need to launch community awareness campaigns, and to integrate the rotavirus vaccine in the routine immunization program [2]. It has been speculated that the reduction in acute gastroenteritis outcomes may be seen primarily in infants younger than 1 year in the first year of vaccine introduction, in those younger than 2 years in the second year of the rotavirus vaccination program, and in incrementally increasing age groups during successive years [3]. Efforts should be therefore made in order to integrate the rotavirus vaccine in the routine immunization schedule, and to incorporate routine screening tests for norovirus in hospitals and other clinical settings.

References