LETTERS TO EDITOR

First description of gastroenteritis viruses in Lebanese children: A pilot study

Sir,

I have 2 comments on the interesting study by Al-Ali et al. [1] on the first description of gastroenteritis viruses in Lebanese children.

First, I presume that the frequency distribution of rotavirus gastroenteritis (RVGE) [48%] in Lebanese children addressed by Al-Ali et al. [1] needs to be considered with caution. Apart from seasonal influence (April–May), short study period (2 months), and limited number of the studied patients \( (n = 79) \), the prior immunization status of the studied patients against rotavirus (RV) represents an additional important limitation. Rotavirus vaccine (RVV) has been incorporated in the immunization schedule worldwide as it was shown to mimic the immunity following natural RV infection that confers protection against severe gastroenteritis and consequently, reduces the risk of primary healthcare utilization, hospitalization, and death. It not only reduces rotavirus activity in infancy but it also decreases rates of RVGE in older and unimmunized children [2]. Moreover; it tends to be very cost-effective and is projected to substantially reduce childhood mortality, particularly in poor countries [3]. I wonder whether RVV is incorporated in the routine immunization schedule of infants and young children in Lebanon as Al-Ali et al. [1] did not consider prior RVV coverage of their studied patients.

Second, though the data addressed by Al-Ali et al. [1] supports the notion that RV remains the leading cause of gastroenteritis worldwide, particularly in the Middle Eastern and North African pediatric population [4], there are emerging evidences that noroviruses are the leading cause of foodborne disease outbreaks worldwide, and may soon eclipse RV as the most common cause of severe pediatric gastroenteritis, as the use of RVV becomes more widespread. Genetic mutations and recombinations contribute to the broad heterogeneity of noroviruses and the emergence of new epidemic strains [5]. Therefore, regular epidemiological surveillance of viral gastroenteritis in Lebanon and implementation of suitable public health measures deem necessary.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

References


Mahmood Dhahir Al-Mendalawi*  
Department of Paediatrics, Al-Kindy College of Medicine, Baghdad University, Baghdad, Iraq  
*Correspondence address: P.O. Box 55302, Baghdad Post Office, Baghdad, Iraq.  
Mobile: +964 07703462470.  
E-mail address: mdalmendalawi@yahoo.com

15 July 2011