Journal homepage www.jzs.univsul.edu.iq
Journal of Zankoy Sulaimani
Part-A- (Pure and Applied Sciences)

Hepatitis A Seropositivity among Children and Students Under 18 Years Old in Sulaimani Governorate-Kurdistan Regional Goverment

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Article info

Original:
28 September 2016
Revised:
3 October 2016
Accepted:
16 October 2016
Published online:
20 March 2017

Key Words:
Anti-IgG, anti IgM, HAV, oral-fecal route, socioeconomic status

Abstract

To find the rates of anti-Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) IgG and IgM seropositivity among less than 18 years-old persons, 328 cases were tested by ELISA in Sulaimani Governorates, Iraqi Kurdistan region. It was observed that 47.86% cases were seropositive for anti-HAV IgG whereas only 16.15% were positive for anti-HAV IgM. Sex showed no significant effects on positive results for both IgG and IgM ($p = 435, 0.891$) respectively. The highest rate of anti- IgG seropositivity was among cases with more than 12 years-old (80.82%) while the highest rate for anti-IgM was among 5-8 years old (2.89%). The age showed noticeable effects on anti-IgG seropositivity ($p = 0.000$) unlike anti-IgM ($p = 0.521$). The child educational level also showed a significant effect on anti-IgG ($p = 0.000$) and anti-IgM ($p = 0.0022$). It was noticed that the well water has a significant effect on anti-IgM seropositivity ($p = 0.027$) among tested cases, while other sources showed no effects on the results ($p>0.05$). Family education showed significant effects on the anti-IgM seropositivity ($p = 0.0022$) unlike anti-IgG ($p = 0.713$). Moreover, it was concluded that the living places and family sizes showed significant effects on both anti-IgG and IgM seropositivity ($p = 0.0022$ and 0.0020) respectively for living places and ($p = 0.0019$ and 0.047) for family size). Socioeconomic status also significantly effective on anti-IgG ($p = 0.0008$) and anti-IgM seropositivity ($p = 0.0078$). The jaundice history showed valuable effects on anti-HAV IgG ($p = 0.0207$) and IgM seropositivity ($p = 0.0017$).

Introduction

In 1967 the term of hepatitis A was firstly used for describing a liver infection due to a virus known as Hepatitis A virus [1]. Hepatitis A virus possesses a single stranded positive-sense RNA genome, non-enveloped, acid stable and it is a member of *Picornavaridae* family. However, it was formerly classified as *Enterovirus*-serotype 72-within the *Picornavaridae* family [2, 3]. Moreover, due to its unique feature among the genus *Hepatovirus*, it requires a long adaptation period to replicate in cell culture and rarely produces a cytopathic effect [4, 5]. Hepatitis A virus can be transmitted by fecal-oral route and the infection usually acquired by person-to-person contact or through ingestion of contaminated food or water [6]. Hepatitis A infection can induce life-long immunity whereas it can also produce effects ranging from asymptomatic to fulminant hepatic failure. Unfortunately in some cases it may lead to death [7]. However, it was previously reported that the fatality rates among Hepatitis A infected individuals was lower than 0.1%, also it was noticed that young children and adults with underlying chronic liver disease were at risk [8].

The severity of hepatitis A infection and clinically apparent infection usually increases with the age, as it was reported by Hadler and colleagues in 1980 [9] that more than 70% of HAV infection can be occurred

among children aged less than six years with no symptoms, while between 70% of the adults infected with hepatitis A virus suffered from more severe infections with clinical symptoms, including jaundice malaise, fever and dark urine [10]. HAV is a worldwide infection and the rates of its prevalence are strongly related to the degree of sanitation and health hygiene [11]. In certain areas of endemic HAV infection, the percentage of anti-HAV IgG seropositivity may reach 90% among adults, whereas in areas with intermediates endemicity the rates declined to 50-60%. At the same time, it was reported that in areas with lowest endemicity rates where hygienic improvement and overall rises in socioeconomic status have brought a fall in HAV infection during early childhood, the majority of adults remains susceptible to HAV infection and the chance of outbreaks is high [12].

The current study aimed to show the percentage rates of anti-Hepatitis A IgG and IgM seropositivity among different age groups, including preschool, primary and preparatory school in some rural and urban areas of Sulaimani Governorate, and studying the factors related to the rates of seropositivity among the studied cases.

Materials and methods

Fresh blood samples were collected from three hundred twenty-eight (328) children and students from different villages, small towns and cities of Sulaimani Governorate during February to June 2015. IgG and IgM for hepatitis A virus were detected using ELISA technique. Three ml of fresh blood was collected from each case and after separation of the serum the samples were stored in -45°C until further works performed.

The ELISA protocol for detection of both IgG and IgM was done according to supplied company directions, and the results were tabulated. Both anti-HAV IgG (EIA- 4233) and ant-HAV IgM (EIA-3889) kits (DRG Diagnostics, Germany) were used for performing ELISA.

Anti-HAV IgG detection:

The assay was based on the principle of competition where the antibodies in the sample compete with anti-HAV specific antibodies, labeled with HRP, for a fixed amount of antigen on the solid phase. A purified and inactivated HAV was coated to the micro-wells. The serum was added to the microwell and antibodies to HAV are captured by the solid phase. As the plates washed, the enzyme conjugate was added, which can bind to the free HAV antigen if still present. Before adding the chromogenic substrate, the plate was washed again. The intensity of the color changes of the end-product was measured.

Anti-HAV IgM detection:

The purified Anti-μ-chain was coated on the solid phase of multi-wells. Serum sample, HAV Ag and Horseradish peroxidase labeled with Anti-HAV (conjugated) were added to coated wells. After incubation, (in the case of presence of HAV-IgM) a complex of Anti-μ-chain-HAV-IgM- HAV Ag-Anti-HAV labeled with HRP was formed. When the plate washed, the wells were incubated with the substrate (Tetramethylbenzidine-TMB). The intensity of colored end-product was measured at 450 nm.

Statistical analysis:

SPSS V.17 software was used, and Chi-square test was depended for statistical analysis.

Results

From this study, out of (328) tested samples, 157 (47.86%) were positive for anti-Hepatitis A IgG, whereas the rate of seropositive anti-HAV IgM was lower, 53 (16.15%) among the tested samples. Only five (1.5%) cases were positive for both anti-HAV IgG and IgM. Moreover, it was noticed that sex has no significant effects on the percentage rates of HAV seropositivity concerning IgG, IgM and both (p = 0.435, 0.588 and 0.891 respectively) (Table, 1).

The tested cases were grouped into five sub-groups, and it was noticed that the age showed noticeable effects on the percentage rates of anti-HAV IgG seropositivity ($p = 0.00$) as it was also concluded that the older the age, the higher the percentage rates of anti-HAV IgG and IgM seropositivity. Whereas the showed no significant effects on the percentage rates of positive results related to anti-HAV IgM and both IgG-IgM seropositivity (p = 0.169, 0.521) respectively (Table, 2).

The education level of the tested cases also was studied. It was concluded that the higher percentage rates of anti-HAV IgG and IgM were among those who are in primary schools. It appeared that the education level of children was significantly effective on anti-HAV IgG and IgM seropositivity (p= 0.00, 0.002) respectively, whereas no significant effects were seen on IgG-IgM seropositivity (p = 0.269) (Table, 3. Moreover, the effects of water supply were studied. It was noticed that water supply has a significant effect on the acute HVA infection expressed as anti-HAV IgM seropositivity (p = 0.027), whereas no significant effects were seen for anti-HAV IgG and IgG-IgM (p = 0.589, 0.594) respectively. It was concluded that the wells as water supply sources were behind the high anti-HAV seropositivity (Table, 4).

Family Education level also was another studied factor. It appeared as that family education has a significant effect on anti-HAV IgM seropositivity (p = 0.0022) while no significant effects were observed regarding anti-HAV IgG and IgG-IgM (P = 0.713, 0.738) respectively. The highest percentage rates of anti-HAV IgG was among those with postgraduate family education, while for IgM, it was among those whose families were illiterate (Table, 5).

Table 1: Anti-HAV IgG and IgM seropositivity related to gender

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Sex	Males	187	93 (49.73)	0.435	32 (17.11)	0.588	3 (1.6)	0.891
	Females	141	64 (45.39)		21 (14.89)		2 (1.41)	
Total (Mean)		328	157 (47.86)		53 (16.15)		5 (0.015)	

Table 2: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to age groups

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Age groups	<3 years	41	9 (21.95)	0.000	3 (7.31)	0.167	0 (0.0)	0.521
	3-5 years	77	22 (28.57)		9 (11.68)		2 (2.59)	
	5-8 years	69	31 (44.92)		12 (17.39)		2 (2.89)	
	8-12 years	68	36 (52.94)		13 (19.11)		1 (1.47)	
	>12years	73	59(80.82)		16(21.91)		0(0.0)	

Table-3- Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to child education level

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Child Education	None	81	11 (13.58)	0.000	4 (4.93)	0.0022	0 (0.0)	0.269
	Kindergarten	73	30 (41.09)		9 (12.32)		2 (2.73)	
	Primary	112	81 (72.32)		27 (24.1)		3 (2.67)	
	Secondary	62	35(56.45)		13(20.96)		0(0.0)	

Table 4: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to water supply sources

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Water Supply	Natural	86	43 (50)	0.589	17 (19.7)	0.027	2 (2.32)	0.594
	Wells	39	21 (53.8)		11 (28.2)		1 (2.5)	
	Chlorinated	203	93(45.8)		25(12.31)		2(0.9)	

Table 5: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to the family education

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Family Education	Illiterate	70	41 (58.57)		17 (24.28)		2 (2.85)	
	Primary*	101	49 (48.51)		24 (23.76)		2 (1.98)	
	Secondary**	108	45 (41.66)	0.713	9 (8.33)	0.0022	1 (0.92)	0.738
	University	37	16 (43.24)		3 (8.1)		0 (0.0)	
	Postgraduate	12	6 (50)		0 (0.0)		0 0.0)	

* Primary school ** secondary school

It was noticed that the percentage rates of anti-HAV seropositivity among rural inhabitants were higher than urban ones. The lifestyle and living places showed significant effects on anti-HAV IgG and IgM (p = 0.0022, 0.0020) respectively, while no effects on anti-HAV IgG-IgM seropositivity were seen (p = 0.348) (Table, 6).

The current study also revealed that the family size had significant effects on anti-HAV IgG and IgM seropositivity (p = 0. 0019, 0.0047) respectively. The bigger the family size, the higher the percentage rates of seropositivity (Table, 7). Socioeconomic status also was studied, it showed significant effects on both anti-HAV IgG and IgM seropositivity (p = 0.0008, 0.0078) respectively. It was noticed that the lower the socioeconomic status, the higher the percentage rates of anti-HAV seropositivity (Table, 8).

Table 6: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to the lifestyle and living places

Studied parameters		Tested No	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Life style (Living Place)	Urban	198	81 (40.9)	0.0022	22 (11.11)	0.0020	2 (1.01)	0.348
	Rural	130	76(58.46)		31(23.84)		3 (2.3)	

Table 7: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM, and IgG-IgM seropositivity related the family size

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Family size	3-5	87	32 (36.78)		10 (11.49)		1 (1.49)	
	5-8	108	46 (42.59)	0.0019	14 (12.96)	0.047	1 (0.92)	0.666
	<8	133	79(59.39		30(22.55)		3(2.25)	

Table 8: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to the socioeconomic status

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti HAV-IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
Socioeconomic Status	Very low	58	37 (63.79)		15 (25.86)		3 (5.17)	
	Low	71	42 (59.15)		16 (22.53)		1 (14.08)	
	Medium	90	41 (45.55)	0.0008	15 (16.66)	0.0078	1 (11.11)	0.139
	Good	68	21 (30.88)		4 (5.88)		0 (0.0)	
	High	41	16(39.02)		3(7.31)		0(0.0)	

The effect of history of jaundice was investigated as well. It was appeared that the history of jaundice was significantly effective on anti-HAV seropositivity concerning both ant-HAV IgG and IgM (p = 0. 0207, 0.0017) respectively (Table, 9).

Table 9: Anti-HAV IgG, IgM and IgG-IgM seropositivity related to the history of jaundice

Studied parameters		Tested No.	Anti-HAV IgG		Anti-HAV IgM		Anti-IgG and IgM	
			No (%)	*p-value*	No (%)	*p-value*	No. (%)	*p-value*
History of Jaundice	Yes	129	73 (56.58)		22 (17.05)		2 (1.55)	
	No	148	59 (39.86)	0.0207	15 (10.13)	0.0017	2 (1.35)	0.953
	Family	51	25(49.01)		16(31.37)		1(1.96)	

Discussions

The percentage rates of HAV seropositivity were relatively high among tested persons, although the rates of anti-HAV IgG were higher than anti-HAV IgM. Our results were agreed with observations recorded by Vitral and co-workers in 2012 [13] in Brazil who found that low socioeconomic status, age and parent's education can act as a risk factor for HAV infection. Similar to our results, they found a proportional relation between increasing the age and increasing the prevalence rate of HAV seropositivity where they found that the older the age, the higher the rates of HAV seropositivity. Similarly, in a previous study, it was found significant relations between some risk factors and HAV seropositivity. It was noticed that the incidence of HAV infection and the prevalence of antibodies against HAV are closely associated with economic development and access to safe drinking water and sanitation. As individual income increases and access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation condition increases, the incidence of HAV infection decreases; the current results were agreed with results reports by other investigators [14].

In a study done in Egypt in 2007 [15], similar observations were reported regarding relations between socioeconomic status, age and poor sanitary areas that showed significant effects on HAV seropositivity like the results from this study. Unlike our observations, they found no weighty relations between HAV seropositivity with family size and history of jaundice. It was reported by other researchers in Palestine that socioeconomic status had significant effects of HAV seropositivity [16], which was similar to the results observed during this study.

Other researchers in Syria [17] found an elevated prevalence of HAV in their study on HAV seropositivity, which was similar to the current results obtained during this study. Investigators in India [18] found that the prevalence of HAV seropositivity was relatively high among preschool children and reached (90.9%)), which is parallel and agreed with conclusions recorded by this study.

The family size was among the important efficient factors on HAV seropositivity in the present study, which agreed with observations reported by other investigators [19] who found the significantly higher prevalence of HAV among crowd families. Similarly, in a previous survey done in Saudi Arabia, related results were noticed, which designated the family size as an important effective factor on HAV seropositivity [20]. This agreed with the results of the present study. The results observed in the present study were disagreed with observations reported by different investigators [21] in the city of Santos, who found that the general prevalence of anti-HAV IgG was 9.72%, among them 74.6% were reactive for anti-HAV IgM. Unlike their results, we noticed higher percentage rates, as well as the percentage rates of IgG seropositivity, were higher than IgM seropositivity. Whereas our results were agreed with some other observations, including child education and sex, which showed similar effects on HAV seropositivity. Moreover, it was reported by them that parent education level had no significant effect, which disagreed with the results of the present study where parent's education showed significant effects. The results of the current study were agreed with observations recorded by other researchers in Mexico in 1997 who found that child and parent's education level were significantly effective on HAV seropositivity [22]. Moreover, they found that the age and drinking water supply (source) were also having a significant effect on HAV seropositivity, which was similar to the current results. It was found in a recent study in Turkey that the percentage of HAV seropositivity was lower than 20% [23], which was different from the results recorded in the current study. They found that the percentage of anti-HAV IgM was higher than anti-IgG, which was entirely different from our results, where we noticed that the percentage rates of anti-HAV seropositivity were greater than that

of anti-IgM. Moreover, in a study done in Iran, it was seen that the rate of HAV seropositivity was 44.3% [24], which was lower than the results obtained by the current study. They noticed that the rate was lower among 7-8 years-old children in comparison to older ones. Our results agreed with these obtained results regarding the age groups and distributions of HAV seropositivity among tested children.

Conclusions

- The highest rate of anti-IgG seropositivity was among cases with more than 12 years old (80.82%) while the highest rate for anti-IgM was among 5-8 years old (2.89%).
- The age, child educational level showed noticeable effects on anti-IgG seropositivity and anti-IgM for the latter.
- The well water has a significant effect on anti-IgM seropositivity.
- The family education, living places, family sizes, socioeconomic status and history of jaundice were significantly effective on the hepatitis A seropositivity results among studied cases.

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