

**Recent outbreak of hepatitis A in Gampola, Sri Lanka.**

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Infection due to Hepatitis A virus (HAV) is clinically indistinguishable from disease caused by other hepatitis viruses. Therefore, serologic testing is required for early confirmation of diagnosis. The prevalence of this disease is closely related to socioeconomic status of the population. An outbreak of hepatitis A like illness was reported in Gampola area in Kandy district affecting hundreds of patients. Our objective was to investigate for the aetiological agents for this outbreak and to study the clinical manifestations and factors contributed to the spread of illness. Venous blood samples were collected from 32 suspected patients hospitalized due to hepatitis A like illness at the Gampola base hospital. Laboratory diagnosis was made by using anti-HAV IgM ELISA. Clinical and socio-economic information were obtained through an interviewer administered questionnaire. Of 22 suspected cases, (mean age =21) 91 % (n=20) were confirmed for HAV by IgM ELISA. Among them, 80 % (n=16) were males. The typical manifestations of acute hepatitis such as nausea/vomiting, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, fever, jaundice and dark urine were observed in 86 %, 90 %, 80 %, 90 %, 60 % and 100 % of confirmed patients respectively. The source of HAV infection was most likely to be either from their working places (50 %, n=10) and restaurants (35 %, n=7) or from an infected family member (15%, n=3). The majority (70 %, n=14) of these patients had been using municipal tap water without boiling. All of them had been using water-sealed toilets. Only 30 % of patients had educated beyond O/L, 80 % (n=16) of the confirmed patients, the monthly income was less than Rs. 15,000.00. The average number of members of each family was 5. The majority (90 %) of them lived in houses with 2-3 rooms. Results suggest that the recent outbreak in Gampola area was hepatitis A. This illness was most likely to be due to poor hygienic practices and lack of background knowledge about this disease in the population.

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