

EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF POSSIBLE HEPATITIS A VIRUS (HAV) EPIDEMICS IN EUROPE

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Introduction: Europe and other Western countries are considered to be areas of low endemicity of Hepatitis A infection, thanks to relatively good hygienic and sanitary conditions. However, due to the large influx of refugees to Europe from Middle East and North Africa regions, which are highly endemic for hepatitis A, several Hepatitis A outbreaks have been recently reported. Moreover, several HAV infection outbreaks have also been recently reported in Europe among men who have sex with men (MSM).

Materials/methods: We performed a systematic PubMed and Medline search to identify published studies on HAV epidemiology and/or outbreaks in European countries during the past 5 years.

Results & Discussion: Since the start of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, there were 2 major studies in Europe on HAV infection among refugees: one was in Greece and the other one was in Germany. The one in Greece reported 177 HAV cases among 62,700 refugees coming from the conflict zone particularly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. During the same period of time, 4 HAV cases were detected between staff responsible for cleaning in 2 hosting camps. In Germany, 699 HAV cases have been reported between Sep' 2015 and Mar' 2016 compared to 482 cases in the same period of previous year. One case has been reported at a nurse working in a mass accommodation. Other studies deduced that the most frequent risk factor to generate new cases of HAV is an immigrant making a recent trip to the country of origin where the endemicity of disease is high. Moreover, hepatitis A outbreaks have been recently reported among men who have sex with men (MSM) in different European countries including Italy, Spain, the Netherland, and England. In the light of these new studies, evidence-based recommendations for the prevention of possible HAV epidemics in Europe are being advanced.

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