

OUTBREAK DISPATCHES

INCREASE IN HEPATITIS A IN MSM IN DENMARK

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A review of notifications to the Department of Epidemiology in the Statens Serum Institut (<http://www.ssi.dk/sw379.asp>) has revealed a cluster of cases of hepatitis A acquired in Denmark among men aged 18 years or older [1]. Twenty eight cases in men have been notified so far in 2004. Of the 20 patients from the greater Copenhagen area, at least 16 are men who have sex with men (MSM). At least five Swedish men have also been infected with hepatitis A in Copenhagen.

In the past five years, the median number of notified cases of hepatitis A acquired in Denmark each year among men aged 18 years or over was eight (range 6-11). Because of missing or delayed notifications, a full overview of the current outbreak has not yet been achieved. An increased incidence of syphilis has also been observed among MSM in Copenhagen [2], but a possible association between these two outbreaks has not yet been established.

Close contacts of infected cases, primarily household members and sexual partners, should receive immunoglobulin or hepatitis A vaccine as quickly as possible. Non-immune MSM who are not in a monogamous relationship should receive vaccination against hepatitis A, preferably together with hepatitis B vaccination. To prevent further spread, it is important that the MSM community is made aware of this outbreak and of routes of infection.

Outbreaks of hepatitis A among MSM have previously been reported both in Copenhagen and abroad, acquired in places such as saunas [3-5]. The most recently described outbreak in Denmark was in 1991 [6]. Studies have established risk factors for infection with hepatitis A among MSM. Examples of these risk factors are recent anonymous sexual partners, oral-anal sex or digital-anal sex, as well as visiting certain bars or saunas. Social contact of a non-sexual nature and secondarily contaminated foodstuffs may also contribute to infection. In the current outbreak, no particular risk factors have so far been found. Danish HIV/AIDS organisations are currently launching a nationwide information campaign about sexually transmitted infections, which includes hepatitis A.

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INCREASE IN HEPATITIS A IN MSM IN THE NETHERLANDS

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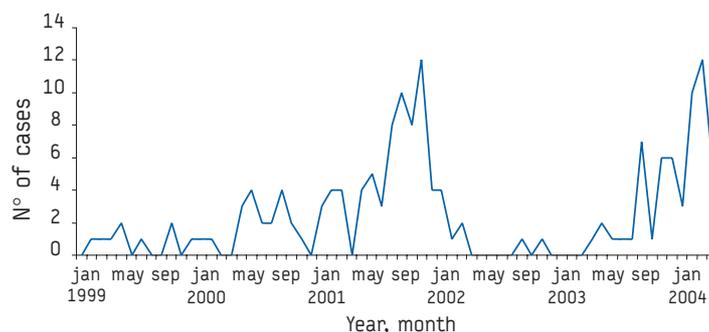
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It is unusual for an upsurge in hepatitis A incidence to be seen in spring or early summer in the Netherlands. A recent increase in the number of notifications of hepatitis A has, however, been detected through the Dutch data collection system for notifiable diseases (FIGURE). Men who have sex with men (MSM) appear to be particularly affected.

FIGURE

Number of notifications of hepatitis A among MSM in the Netherlands. 1999 -2004



In 2004, there have so far been 99 notifications of hepatitis A acquired by men aged 18 years or older, compared with 37 during the same period in 2003. Among the notifications in 2004, 31 reported homosexual sex as a risk factor for hepatitis A. Information about patients' sexual behaviour is not yet a standard requirement of notification of hepatitis A across the country and therefore hepatitis A cases acquired by this route of infection could be underestimated at present.

In 2003, there was just one notification with sex between men as a risk factor over the same period of time. However, the current outbreak is not unusual; a similar increase in hepatitis A infections in MSM was seen in 2001.

The recent outbreak of lymphogranuloma venereum in MSM [1] has increased awareness of sexually transmitted infections in the MSM community, and so sex between men may now be being recorded more often as a risk factor for transmission.

Reference

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