

MELIOIDOSIS – AN EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN SOUTHERN TAIWAN

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BACKGROUND/AIMS: Melioidosis has been well known to be endemic in Thailand and Northern Australia. However, it has been reported sporadically in Taiwan before 2005. However, in 2005 an unusual clustering of melioidotic cases occurred in southern Taiwan.

METHODS: We retrospectively analyzed 58 patients, accounting for 49% of 118 reported cases in Taiwan, from four teaching hospitals in southern Taiwan between 2000 and 2005. 40 clustering cases and 18 sporadic cases were enrolled in the study to investigate their clinical characteristics and antimicrobial susceptibility.

RESULTS: Fifty-one (88%) cases were found between May to September, the rainy season in Taiwan. There was a significant correlation between the average monthly rainfalls and the number of cases of melioidosis ($r=0.37$; $P=0.001$). Diabetes mellitus, noted in 35 (60%) cases, was the most common underlying disease. The vast majority (51 cases, 88%) had never traveled abroad before the illness, indicating indigenous acquisition of *Burkholderia pseudomallei*. In comparison with sporadic cases, clustering cases were older, had underlying diabetes mellitus less often and had a shorter duration of clinical symptoms before admission ($P<0.005$). The in-hospital mortality rate was 15% in clustering cases, and 28% in sporadic cases. Shock at admission was independently associated with a grave prognosis. Ceftazidime, imipenem, meropenem, amoxicillin/clavulanic acid, co-trimoxazole, and doxycycline were potential treatment choices for melioidosis.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS: Taiwan, especially the southern part, could be considered an endemic area of melioidosis.

Key words: *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, Taiwan, melioidosis.