

SEROPREVALENCE OF HEPATITIS B AND C VIRAL INFECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

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BACKGROUND/AIMS: Increasing trend of chronic liver diseases stressed the need to study seroprevalence of hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C viral (HCV) infections and modes of transmission.

METHODS: A seroprevalence study was conducted. Screening on markers of HBV and HCV infections (HBsAg, HBeAg, HBs+HBc, anti-HCV) was performed in IFA using the test-system of the Russian firm "Imbio". Surveillance data were reviewed and analyzed for two periods; 1999-2004 and 1986-1992. Data for 1986-1992 served as control.

RESULTS: 5.0% of the population were HBsAg positive, 23% - HBs+HBc positive and 6% - anti-HCV-positive. When compared with the serologic profile of 1986-1992, it appeared that along with the decrease of HBeAg positives, HBV chronic infection and HBsAg- negative profiles were increasing. HBV infection markers were mainly detected in the age group of 20-29, while anti-HCV was common in the age group of 40-49. HCV prevalence was 6-8 times greater in the male population. M/F ratio of HBV morbidity was 2-2.5, the ratio was 10 in mixed infections.

The main modes of transmission of HBV and HCV infections were injecting drug use (33.4%) and sexual contact (32.4%). In 1986-1992 the main modes of transmission were various medical manipulations (58.6%) and transfusion of blood and blood products (12.0%).

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS: Hepatitis B and C viral infections are acquiring new patterns; such as younger age, uncommon ways of transmission etc. The revealed high seroprevalence of HBV and HCV infections is characteristic for hyperendemic countries, whilst Georgia belongs to the moderate endemic countries. It is necessary to review the existing control and preventive strategy in terms of the status of the country and the prevailing vaccination schedule.

Key words: Viral hepatitis Band C, Seroprevalence, Endemicity.