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The epidemiology of viral hepatitis in Saudi Arabia

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Aim: The aim of this study was to investigate the incidence of hepatitis A, B and C in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to determine which age group is most commonly infected by which one of the hepatitis viruses A, B or C.

Background: The epidemiology of viral hepatitis in Saudi Arabia has undergone major changes, concurrent with major socioeconomic developments over the last two to three decades. This disease represents a major public health problem in Saudi Arabia resulting in the need for considerable healthcare resources.

Method: A retrospective analysis of the reported cases of viral hepatitis was conducted based on the reports of The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia about Hepatitis A, B and C cases in all the regions of Saudi Arabia from 2006 to 2010.

Results: Our study demonstrated that the incidence of viral hepatitis showed a decreasing pattern over the study period, except for the incidence of hepatitis B in Saudis that showed a small increase. Of hepatitis A, B, and C, HBV was the most predominant type of hepatitis, accounting for (53%) of the cases, followed by HCV (30%) and HAV (17%). HAV infection predominates in children (5–14 years) with 60% of HAV cases, HBV in young adults (15–44 years) with 69% of HBV cases, and HCV in older adults (>45 years) with 59% of cases ($p < 0.01$).

Conclusion: Despite significant changes in the incidence of viral hepatitis A, B and C, it remains a major public health problem in Saudi Arabia; however, it showed a significant decline in the last two decades that could be attributed to the nationwide vaccination programs and the improved health facilities, but further investigations and better health controls are needed to control the increase in HBV incidence.

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