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Research Summary

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Category (clinical/public health): Both Clinical and Public health
Data focus: SHEFA

Title Hepatitis B the Vanuatu Story

Abstract

Introduction:

Chronic Hepatitis B infection causes great morbidity and premature deaths from cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. In areas of high endemicity such as the Pacific, Hepatitis B is most commonly spread from mother to child at birth i.e perinatal transmission. Hepatitis B infection contracted in the first few years of life is more likely to result in chronic carriage of the virus. The aim of this study is to determine the prevalence of hepatitis B among antenatal women visiting the antenatal clinic at Vila Central Hospital (VCH) in 2013.

Methods:

This is a retrospective study for the period from January 1 st to December 31 st 2013. Medical records were used to document hemoglobin and serology investigation and record demographic details. There was a total of 3036 women whom presented to deliver their babies at VCH in 2013. Of these 2925 met the inclusion criteria. Data was entered onto and analysed via microsoft excel.

In a similar way results were taken for the period from January 2020 to December 2020 for ANC women and Blood donors, in order to assess if there have been any improvements in testing as well as prevalence.

Results:

Of 3036 women who delivered at VCH 2925 presented for antenatal care (ANC) 2597, only 259 (9%) were tested for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) and 33 (12%) were positive. Blood donor screening of 1685 donors from January 2012 to August 2013 revealed a HBsAg positivity rate of 14.2%. (The donor blood result indicates that in the general population there is a high prevalence of hepatitis B).

An update of this study was for from January 2020 to December 2020. ANC clinic during that same period revealed that out of 2934 HBsAg tests done 301 were tested for Hepatitis B and revealed a HBsAg positivity rate of 10.3%. Blood donor screening of 1204 donors from the same period revealed a positivity of 115 and a rate of 10%.

Discussion:

For a few months in 2013 there was no reagent for HbsAg and syphilis screening which resulted in low levels of screening for Hepatitis B in the antenatal group. With an improvement in testing of ANC in 2020, and a similar result with blood donor makes it logical to predict that Hepatitis B prevalence in Vanuatu would be >10%.

Conclusion:

Despite this limitation, the results demonstrate that there is a high prevalence of hepatitis B infection in the Vanuatu population and among antenatal women. These results highlight the importance of improving perinatal Hepatitis B vaccination rates in order to interrupt perinatal transmission of Hepatitis B.