A Cluster of Hepatitis E Virus Infection in Hokkaido, Japan

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On November 16, 2004, the Kitami Health Center (KHC) of Hokkaido, Japan, was notified of a case of hepatitis E in a 69-year-old man who had shown symptoms of diarrhea and fever in the middle of September. He deteriorated rapidly and died of fulminant hepatitis on October 14. A retrospective survey revealed that the patient and his family members had visited a barbecue restaurant on August 14. The survey further revealed that total of 388 individuals visited the restaurant on the same day and might have eaten barbecued meat such as beef, pork, chicken as well as various organs of these animals. Because the case described here was also related to that of JSM-Sap 95 (AB161717.1) (2). PCR product from the only positive sample was most closely related to the acute phase. Therefore, it is generally subclinical during approximately 6 weeks following primary infection even in individuals who develop the illness (4). Most HEV-infected cases recover spontaneously without developing obvious hepatitis or even any symptoms. The period in which it is possible to detect the viral gene from clinical specimens is limited to the acute phase. Therefore, it is generally difficult to identify the source of infection or trace the route of infection.

It is important to obtain detailed epidemiological data in order to be able to distinguish cluster cases from sporadic ones. It is essential to develop more sensitive and specific methods of confirming HEV infection in suspected cases.

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REFERENCES


