

## Increasing incidence of hepatitis A in Lebanese adults: Call for a vaccine strategy

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**Background:** Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection is highly endemic in developing countries, including countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). During the past three decades there has been a shift in the age of HAV infection in many developing countries from early childhood to adulthood (epidemiological shift). Moreover the clinical picture appears to be changing from asymptomatic or mild infection in childhood to fulminate in adults.

**Objective:** To confirm HAV epidemiological shift in Lebanon and accordingly propose strategies for HAV vaccination

**Patients and Methods:** 1. HAV seroprevalence was studied in 320 healthy Lebanese subjects (20-60 years). 2. Data on acute hepatitis A virus cases for the past 11 years (2001-2012) as reported by the Epidemiological Surveillance Unit (ESU) at the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health were analyzed.

**Results and discussion:** Analysis of the data reported by the ESU showed that the percentage of affected children aged 0-9 years is significantly decreasing while the number of affected individuals aged 10-39 years is increasing with time. Furthermore the seroprevalence data on the healthy Lebanese adults did not exceed 72% and this was remarkably lower when compared to earlier studies in Lebanese adults. Both observations confirm HAV epidemiological shift in Lebanon and hence an increased risk of HAV outbreaks among adults

**Conclusion:** In most MENA countries including Lebanon a campaign for universal childhood HAV vaccine should be implemented. A catch-up vaccination approach directed at 10-50 years of age groups should also be considered.

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