

Prevalence and Risk Factors of Asymptomatic Hepatitis C Virus Infection in Egyptian Children.

Abstract

AIM: To identify the prevalence, risk factors and manifestations of asymptomatic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in Egyptian children.

METHODS: Children at the age of 1-9 years were screened for HCV antibodies and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) levels. Every child with elevated ALT and/or detectable HCV antibodies was tested for HCV RNA by RT-PCR and compared with two negative controls for risk factors and signs and symptoms of liver disease.

RESULTS: We screened 1042 children, six of them had elevated ALT, negative HCV antibody and positive RNA, likely representing acute hepatitis C cases. Fifteen children were HCV seropositive, 5 of them were HCV RNA positive. Asymptomatic HCV infection was present in 2.02% (positive results for either HCV antibodies or HCV-RNA or both). Symptoms such as diarrhea, abdominal pain, history of fatigue and school absence because of illness and risk factors such as dental care were significantly more common among HCV positive cases than among controls. None of the HCV positive children was diagnosed as having signs of advanced liver disease upon clinical or ultrasonographic examination.

CONCLUSION: Asymptomatic HCV infection is detectable in 2.02% Egyptian children.