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Abstract Title:

Outbreak of hepatitis A cases among men who have sex with men in Malta, 2017

First author:

Dr Maria Borg

Other Authors:

Alastair Donachie

Tanya Melillo

Abstract

Background

Since February 2016, the number of cases of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection among men who have sex with men (MSM) has been increasing in Europe. In February 2017, the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit (IDCU) in Malta detected the first case of HAV among MSM. We investigated to identify the likely route of transmission and implement control measures.

Methods

Confirmed HAV cases are routinely reported to the IDCU. We defined cases as MSM with positive anti-HAV IgM since 01/01/2017 with reported sexual activity 50 days prior to disease onset. We traced close sexual contacts of cases and actively followed them up by offering HAV vaccination and advice on prevention and control measures.

Results

Between January and March 2017, three cases of HAV infection were identified in MSM, all of whom were epidemiologically linked. Their ages ranged from 35–37 years; all required hospitalisation. The index case travelled to Italy one month before symptom onset and had sex with multiple partners at a swimming pool party. The second case was a sexual contact of the index case and the third was a sexual contact of the second case. The third case had another sexual contact who did not get infected as he was vaccinated against HAV. None of the cases had practiced safe sex or were vaccinated against HAV.

Conclusions

Sexual transmission among MSM was the most likely route of infection. This outbreak highlights the need for raising awareness about the risk of sexual transmission of HAV among MSM. We recommend conducting cross-sectional studies to identify knowledge and risk behaviours contributing to HAV infection and estimate HAV vaccination coverage among MSM in Malta.

Message



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This research highlights the need for raising awareness about the risk of sexual transmission of HAV among MSM in Malta. In addition, more awareness about the value and availability of HAV vaccination for MSM in Malta is needed.