Correspondence

Low Seroprevalence of Human Herpesvirus 8 Infection in Croatia

Sir—We read with interest the study on seroprevalence of human herpesvirus 8 (HHV-8) in northern Thailand [1] and would like to report seroprevalence data about HHV-8 infection in Croatia. It is believed that prevalence of HHV-8 infection and Kaposi sarcoma (KS) in the Mediterranean region is high [2–6], and this prompted us to investigate the prevalence of HHV-8 infection in different parts of our country. Croatia has a population of ∼4.5 million people and includes both a long, coastal Mediterranean region and a continental central and eastern European region. The prevalence of KS and HIV infection in Croatia is low [7]. We analyzed data from 219 blood donors, 59 of whom were from Zagreb and 160 of whom were from Dubrovnik. In addition, data from 166 HIV-infected patients, 36 from the Mediterranean region of Croatia and 130 from other parts of Croatia, were also analyzed. The samples were obtained during 2000. Antibodies to HHV-8 were tested with commercially available ELISAs with use of whole-virus extract from purified virus that was isolated from the KS-1 cell line as antigen (Advanced Biotechnologies) [8]. The assay measures antibody to the majority of HHV-8 structural proteins. All tests were performed and interpreted according to the manufacturer’s guidelines.

We found antibodies to HHV-8 in 31 (8.1%) of 385 subjects. The seroprevalence of HHV-8 infection was 13.3% (22 of 166 subjects) among HIV-infected patients and 4.1% (9 of 219 subjects) among blood donors. KS was present in 6 (3.6%) of 166 HIV-infected patients, and all of them had high titers of antibody against HHV-8.

There were no differences in HHV-8 prevalence between HIV-infected patients in the Mediterranean part of Croatia and similar patients in other parts of the country (OR, 0.78; 95% CI, 0.18–2.60). No anti–HHV-8 antibodies were found in samples obtained from blood donors from Dubrovnik. All blood donors who tested positive for anti–HHV-8 were men from the continental region of Croatia. This contrasts with findings from a study conducted in the Albanian and Italian Mediterranean region, in which an overall seroprevalence of 17.6% was found among healthy individuals [2]. The results of HHV-8 prevalence studies depend on the assay used [9]; however, Cattani et al. [2] used the same ELISA for confirmation of HHV-8 infection that was used in our study.

In conclusion, Croatia has a low overall prevalence of HHV-8. In our study, antibodies to HHV-8 were predominantly found in HIV-infected men who have sex with men (14 [29.2%] of 48 subjects), suggesting a sexually transmitted pattern of infection.

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Potential conflicts of interest. All authors: no conflicts.

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Efforts toward Rubella Elimination and Improved Quality of Health Care Services

SIR—The potential of extensive programs of vaccination against rubella to prevent congenital rubella syndrome has been recently highlighted and reviewed [1–4]. The importance of such vaccination programs, which can also be effective during the postpartum period and provide persistent, long-term immunity, is also well assessed [1–6]. Vaccination of not only rubella-susceptible adolescents and adult