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Detection of *human metapneumovirus* in hospitalized children with acute respiratory tract infections in Sulaimani Province, Iraq

Tariq A G Aziz
University of Sulaimani, Iraq

Background: *Human Metapneumovirus (hMPV)* is a member of Paramyxoviridae family. It is an important viral pathogen of respiratory tract infections among children. Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine the incidence of hMPV infections among children less than 5 years of age with respiratory tract infections at the pediatric hospital in Sulaimani city of Iraq. Also, this study aims to evaluate the different diagnostic methods for the detection of this virus.

Method: Nasopharyngeal swabs and throat swabs were collected from 300 hospitalized children with respiratory infections under 5 years of age between April 2011 and March 2012. Each sample was used for hMPV detection by conventional reverse transcriptase (RT – PCR) and direct fluorescent assay (DFA). A questionnaire which was designed for acute respiratory tract infections among hospitalized children was also included.

Results: *Human Metapneumovirus* was detected in 16% by RT – PCR and 14.7% by DFA. Autumn – winter period was the most common season for hMPV infections with its peak occurrence in January and February.

Conclusions: hMPV is an important pathogen associated with RTIs in children. RT-PCR is highly sensitive and specific for the detection of hMPV than antigen detection methods used for the diagnosis of hMPV viruses.

drtariq.aziz47@yahoo.com

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