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National surveillance for influenza and influenza like illness in Qatar, January–December 2015: An analysis of sentinel surveillance systems

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Influenza contributes globally to the burden of infectious diseases by an annual increase in mortality rates of 40 to 50 million cases across the world. The risk groups are predominantly young children and the elderly. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) collaborated to characterize viral etiologic agents associated with influenza like illness (ILI) and to explore epidemiological distribution of influenza virus in Qatar. A retrospective epidemiological study based on national influenza surveillance data was obtained from the system of sentinel sites and National Influenza Center (NIC). For laboratory confirmed cases, nasopharyngeal and/or oropharyngeal swabs were taken and samples were transferred for viral isolation by real time-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) in the time period from January 1st to 31st December 2015. Of a total of 12,648 specimens tested, 3,250 (25.7%) were positive. Laboratory-confirmed cases were reported to MOPH by all sentinel sites in the country. Of the positive specimens, 2,820 (86.8%) were influenza A and 430 (13.2%) were influenza B virus. Seasonal influenza A viruses, 2,219 (78.7%) were subtyped as influenza A (H1N1) pdm09. Influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 viruses were the predominant strains reported from all health regions. Throughout this season, positivity for influenza A and B virus infection reported in the age group of 18-49 years was higher compared to all other age groups. Among those who tested positive, the proportion of influenza A was higher among females (66.8%) than males (33.2%). Qatari (52.7%) patients were more affected than Non-Qatari (47.3%) patients. On the contrary, laboratory confirmed influenza B virus infection was higher among Non-Qataris (74.0%) than Qataris (26.0%) and this strain partially circulated among both male and female patients. Our surveillance data confirms the predominance of viral influenza in Qatar and all age groups were affected. We recommend that national level immunization campaigns should be conducted to reduce the burden of influenza. National rates of influenza should be monitored at regular intervals and intervention programs should be evaluated for their cost effectiveness.

Biography

Hamad Eid Al Romaihi received his Medical degree from the Arabian Gulf University, Kingdom of Bahrain in 2004. He underwent Arab Board Community Medicine training in 2009 and received his Fellowship in Public Health in 2011 in UK. From September 2016 to present, he is taking up Diploma in Travel Medicine at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow, Scotland, UK. He joined the Ministry of Public Health in November 2012 as Head of Surveillance and Outbreak Control. His current post is Manager of Health Protection and Communicable Disease Control. He is also a Public Health Medicine Consultant with special interests in emerging infections, travel health and immunization.

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