CLINICAL FEATURES OF INFLUENZA A AND B INFECTIONS IN CHILDREN 1-3 YEARS OF AGE

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Background and aims: It is generally thought that influenza A viruses cause more severe illnesses than influenza B viruses. However, this conventional concept may be seriously confounded by age because in most studies children with influenza B have been substantially older than those with influenza A. We compared the clinical presentation of influenza A and B infections in homogeneous groups of outpatient children 1-3 years of age.

Methods: We followed cohorts of pre-enrolled children (n=1185) throughout two consecutive influenza seasons. The children were examined at our study clinic whenever they had fever or signs of respiratory infection. During each visit, the signs and symptoms were recorded on a structured form, and nasal swabs were obtained for virological analyses.

Results: Of 127 children diagnosed with influenza, 92 had influenza A and 35 had influenza B. The mean highest temperatures were 38.9°C in children with influenza A and 38.7°C in children with influenza B infections; 40% of children with influenza A and 34% of children with influenza B had fever ≥39.0°C (both differences statistically not significant). No significant differences were observed in the frequencies of rhinitis, cough, gastrointestinal symptoms, impaired general condition, laryngitis, wheezing, conjunctivitis, or tonsillar exudates between children with influenza A and B. Acute otitis media developed in 30% of children with influenza A and in 26% of those with influenza B (difference not significant).

Conclusions: The clinical presentation and severity of influenza A and B infections appear to be comparable in children 1-3 years of age.