Abstract

Because of their asymptomatic nature and nonspecific symptoms, laboratory tests are often required to diagnose a sexually transmitted infection. Over the past few years, there have been advances in technology, such as the development of nucleic acid amplification assays, which have improved our ability to diagnose infections caused by Chlamydia trachomatis. The finding that nucleic acid amplification tests can detect more infected individuals and are useful in screening low prevalence populations, has led to the development of strategies designed to reduce the cost of these assays without significantly impacting their sensitivity. The development of new tests for the diagnosis of syphilis has gained momentum from the report of a synthetic VDRL antigen, which will result in better nontreponemal antibody tests for syphilis. In spite of the completion of the genome sequence of Treponema pallidum and its annotation, we are still unable to cultivate this microorganism in vitro. However, the molecular revolution has resulted in the development of PCR assays for detecting Treponema pallidum in various types of clinical specimens, and to the production of recombinant antigens for use in tests that detect treponemal-specific antibodies. Further research will improve the availability of low cost, sensitive tests for the diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections. The English version of this paper is available too at: http://www.insp.mx/salud/index.html

Keywords

laboratory diagnosis; bacterial STD; syphilis; gonorrhea; chlamydial infection.