Abstract

Hepatitis E virus (HEV) is an RNA virus enterically-transmitted, associated to zoonosis, and a high rate of fulminating hepatitis en pregnant women. This paper describes the main molecular and epidemiological characteristics of HEV. It has been recently classified as the only member of the Hepevirus genus of the new Hepeviridae family. At present, all strains which infect humans are grouped in 4 of the 5 genotypes identified for HEV. A high rate of HEV infection has been described among young adults in productive ages. During the course of the infection anti-HEV IgM antibodies signify an acute infection, while anti-HEV IgG antibodies constitute an epidemiological marker of the virus transmitted infection. In spite of its worldwide distribution and its predominance in developing countries, HEV has been one of the least studies hepatitis viruses at a global level. The true impact of this disease in Latin America is unknown due to the scarcity of immunodiagnostic diagnostic kits commercially available for its detection, limiting the use of these methodologies to isolated epidemiological investigations. Future studies are required for optimizing the existing serologic immunoassays, facilitating their incorporation to routine clinical laboratory tests.

Keywords

E virus, zoonosis, pregnancy, fulminating hepatitis