Summary of Current Viral Hepatitis Surveillance, Treatment, and Prevention Programs in Arctic Countries

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Viral hepatitis is an important problem in many Arctic countries. Hepatitis A virus infection remains endemic with periodic outbreaks despite the availability of an effective vaccine. The World Health Organization (WHO) will release new guidelines in 2015 for the management of persons with chronic hepatitis B virus infection living in resource-limited settings. Similarly, WHO and many Arctic countries are updating guidelines for the management of chronic hepatitis C virus infection to guide use of recently approved and highly-effective direct-acting antiviral agents. To provide a baseline for evaluating the impact of these changes, we sought to describe the surveillance systems and treatment/prevention programs currently in place for hepatitis A, B, and C in countries with Arctic populations. We developed and distributed a survey to representatives at public health agencies in the eight Arctic countries (USA [Alaska], Canada [3 northern provinces], Greenland, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia). The survey included questions regarding key elements of the surveillance system (e.g., case definitions, screening programs, requirements for case reporting, any follow-up/linkage to care of cases), prevention programs (e.g., vaccination guidelines, funding for vaccinations), and treatment programs (e.g., existence of treatment registries, funding for treatment, treatment guidelines). Based on the survey responses, we will compare the viral hepatitis management programs among the Arctic countries/regions. Our survey results could help countries identify opportunities to improve their surveillance systems and treatment/prevention programs. In addition, the survey can identify areas where all countries collect similar data; synchronizing and sharing those data between Arctic countries can facilitate collaboration on epidemiologic research questions of shared interest.