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Antoine Biron, Cecile Cazorla, Julien Amar, Anne Pfannstiel, Myrielle Dupont-Rouzeyrol, et al.. Zika virus infection as an unexpected finding in a Leptospirosis patient . JMM Case reports, Microbiology Society, 2016, 3 (3), pp.e005033.

HAL Id: hal-01399808
https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01399808
Submitted on 8 Jun 2017

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Zika virus infection as an unexpected finding in a Leptospirosis patient

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Introduction: Areas where leptospirosis and arboviruses are endemic largely overlap in the tropics. However, the number of arbovirus infections is usually much higher. The initial clinical presentation can be highly confusing; therefore, laboratory confirmation is key to an accurate diagnosis.

Case Presentation: A 19–year–old man presented to a peripheral health centre with an acute febrile illness. Dengue was initially suspected, but the patient deteriorated to a shock syndrome. Leptospirosis as well as a co-infection with Zika virus were both confirmed in the laboratory, the latter being clinically masked in this dual infection.

Conclusion: This case highlights the importance of not only considering the differential diagnosis of acute febrile syndromes, but also to consider the possibility of dual infections in the context of global spread of arboviruses. The specific context of travellers returning from endemic areas and pregnant women is also highlighted and discussed.

Keywords: leptospirosis; zika virus; shock syndrome; amoxycillin; differential diagnosis; dual infection.

Introduction

In the last few years, an unprecedented wave of mosquito-borne viral infections has hit the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (Roth et al., 2014), and has also spread globally, putting new naïve populations at risk (Noel & Rizzo, 2014). As a result, a high level of awareness of arboviral diseases has reached the medical and public health communities leading to increased surveillance. In some tropical settings (e.g. in New Caledonia), all requests for laboratory diagnosis of any arboviral infection (dengue, chikungunya or Zika) in a hospitalized patient are systematically tested for all three viruses, as part of the public health surveillance scheme. A similar high awareness is not present for leptospirosis, a zoonotic bacterial disease, which is one of the possible differential diagnosis of acute febrile syndromes. We report a case of severe leptospirosis (with an initial suspicion of dengue) that was co-infected with Zika virus, emphasizing the risk of Leptospira and arbovirus dual infections, already reported before (Sharp et al., 2012).

Case report

A 19–year–old male with previous good health and no significant past medical history, presented to a peripheral health centre 24 h after the onset of a febrile flu-like
syndrome with fever, myalgia and painful cough. A suspicion of dengue led to a request for a laboratory diagnosis, and the patient was referred to the emergency department of New Caledonia central hospital, where he arrived 36 h after the onset of fever (Fig. 1). The pulmonary auscultation was normal, but the hemodynamic condition was unstable. Upon questioning, the patient reported a swim in a river on the North-East coast of New Caledonia two weeks before, a known exposure risk for leptospirosis in the Pacific (Berlioz-Arthaud et al., 2007). A blood culture and a Leptospira PCR were requested. The hemodynamic condition rapidly deteriorated, and the patient was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit, where he received noradrenalin, fluid infusion and was treated with Ceftriaxone and Gentamycin for a septic shock. Blood analysis revealed a thrombocytopenia $80 \times 10^9 \text{ L}^{-1}$, elevated C-Reactive Protein (CRP $241.5 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$), Procalcitonin (PCT, $60.9 \text{ ng mL}^{-1}$), Lactate (3.62 mmol L$^{-1}$) and Lactate Dehydrogenase (LDH, 256 UI L$^{-1}$).

The next day, Leptospira PCR (Stoddard et al., 2009) returned a positive result with a quantified 192 bacteria/ml. The Leptospira lfb1 sequence used to identify the putative infecting serovar (Perez & Goarant, 2010) pointed to serogroup Icterohaemorrhagiae. The patient clinically improved, leading to discontinuation of noradrenaline support. Similarly, Ceftriaxone and Gentamycin were changed to Amoxicillin upon receipt of the positive Leptospira PCR result. The patient was transferred the next day to the Infectious Disease Department where Amoxicillin was continued. The laboratory blood results normalized, and patient was discharged after a week. However, there was persistent thrombocytopenia ($34 \times 10^9 \text{ L}^{-1}$). At the time of discharge, the Zika RT-qPCR on the sample collected at first medical visit at the peripheral health centre returned a positive result (on both RNA targets (Lanciotti, 2008)), with an estimated $2 \times 10^5$ to $1.5 \times 10^6$ viral RNA/ml. A full blood count showed a return to subnormal platelet count ($114 \times 10^9 \text{ L}^{-1}$) two days later. The timeline of medical history is summarised in Fig. 1, the relevance of each symptom to both infectious agents is considered in Table 1.
Leptospirosis is endemic in New Caledonia, and the medical community is highly aware of this bacterial zoonosis. Epidemiological criteria are systematically considered for leptospirosis suspicion. However, because of unprecedented epidemics of arbovirus in the Pacific, and the larger size of outbreaks, arboviral diseases are often considered high up in the list of differential diagnoses of acute febrile syndromes. The patient presented early but probably failed to mention freshwater swimming, which is a well-known risk factor in New Caledonia, and so leptospirosis was initially not considered in the differential diagnosis. His condition rapidly deteriorated to a septic shock with laboratory tests indicating a bacterial infection (CRP and PCT). Quantitative PCR and genotyping revealed a leptospiraemia caused by a strain from serogroup Icterohaemorrhagiae. The rapid presentation and antimicrobial treatment probably contributed to prompt recovery (Tubiana et al., 2013). Leptospirosis may also be considered in such patients (Arcilla et al., 2012, Maria, et al., 2016). This is important because it might not only lead to post-infectious neurological disorders (Cao-Lormeau et al., 2016), but also failure to arrange appropriate follow-up in pregnant women, if it is not diagnosed correctly. The case reported here highlights the importance of accurate diagnosis and management of dual infections with appropriate use of antibiotic therapy. This should especially be considered in returning travellers or when Zika infection is present in pregnant women.

### Discussion

Leptospirosis is endemic in New Caledonia, and the medical community is highly aware of this bacterial zoonosis. Epidemiological criteria are systematically considered for leptospirosis suspicion. However, because of unprecedented epidemics of arbovirus in the Pacific, and the larger size of outbreaks, arboviral diseases are often considered high up in the list of differential diagnoses of acute febrile syndromes. The patient presented early but probably failed to mention freshwater swimming, which is a well-known risk factor in New Caledonia, and so leptospirosis was initially not considered in the differential diagnosis. His condition rapidly deteriorated to a septic shock with laboratory tests indicating a bacterial infection (CRP and PCT). Quantitative PCR and genotyping revealed a leptospiraemia caused by a strain from serogroup Icterohaemorrhagiae. The rapid presentation and antimicrobial treatment probably contributed to prompt recovery (Tubiana et al., 2013). Leptospirosis may also be considered in such patients (Arcilla et al., 2012, Maria, et al., 2016). This is important because it might not only lead to post-infectious neurological disorders (Cao-Lormeau et al., 2016), but also failure to arrange appropriate follow-up in pregnant women, if it is not diagnosed correctly. The case reported here highlights the importance of accurate diagnosis and management of dual infections with appropriate use of antibiotic therapy. This should especially be considered in returning travellers or when Zika infection is present in pregnant women.

### Table 1. Clinical symptoms and laboratory results and their relevance to leptospirosis and Zika virus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Leptospirosis</th>
<th>Zika Virus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever &gt;38.5°C</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myalgia</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Leukocytopenia</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Leukocytosis</td>
<td>+/ -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrombocytopenia</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low RBC and hemoglobin</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High CRP</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High PCT</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Lactates &amp; LDH</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- , +/-, +, ++ and +++ indicate the relevance for each parameter in increasing order (- not relevant; +++ fully relevant)

### References


