Staph Found in 11% of Vaginal-Rectal Specimens

BY TIMOTHY F. KIRN
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SAN FRANCISCO — Staphylococcus aureus was carried in the vaginal-rectal area in 11% of screened pregnant women at a Camden, N.J., hospital, according to a study presented at the annual Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy.

The investigators took vaginal-rectal specimens collected from pregnant women being screened for group B streptococcus from June 2005 until March 2006 and cultured them for S. aureus. Of 353 women screened, 39 (11%) were colonized with staphylococcus; 7 of the 39 (2%) were methicillin-resistant strains, said Dr. Henry Fraimow of Cooper University Hospital in Camden. Five of the seven MRSA isolates contained the Panton-Valentine leukocidin virulence gene. All seven were susceptible to clindamycin and levofloxacin.

The study could help to explain why in Camden generally half of S. aureus accesses occur below the waist, and why Camden nurseries have had outbreaks of neonatal S. aureus infections, Dr. Fraimow said at the conference, which was sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology.

“This is higher than reported rates of vaginal colonization with staph aureus, most [studies] of which were done in the 1980s during some of the toxic shock syndrome outbreaks,” he said. “There hasn’t been a lot of good recent data.”

One other recent study that looked at vaginal colonization found a higher rate of carriage, 18%, but a lower rate of methicillin resistance, 0.5%, he added.

Dr. Fraimow and his colleagues also found much more carriage in the summer months than during the rest of the year. They found that 14% of the specimens collected between June and September were colonized, compared with only 7% of those collected between October and March.

“We also conclude that all reservoirs for this organism must be considered when looking at strategies such as decolonization to prevent recurrent infections,” Dr. Fraimow said.

Study Challenges Breast-Feeding as IQ Boost for Kids

Breast-feeding has little or no effect on children’s later intelligence, according to the largest study ever to address this question.

The influence of breast-feeding on cognitive ability has been debated for more than 70 years, with multiple potentially confounding factors having been identified. These include socioeconomic status, birth weight, maternal history of smoking, maternal and paternal education, and race or ethnicity. Maternal intelligence, however, has largely been overlooked as a potential confounder in studies investigating the effects of breast-feeding, according to Geoff Der, a statistician at the Medical Research Council’s Social and Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow, Scotland.

Analyzing data from 5,475 children and their mothers in the population-based U.S. national longitudinal survey of youth that began in 1979, Mr. Der and his colleagues found that if maternal intelligence was not included as a potential confounder, breast-feeding did appear to exert beneficial effects on children’s intelligence, adding approximately 4 points. However, when maternal intelligence was included in the analysis, breast-feeding was associated with an increase of less than half a point (BMJ 2006 Oct. 4 [doi:10.1136/ bmj.38978.699383.53]). Previous studies not having considered maternal intelligence was “surprising given the heritability of intelligence,” he observed.

The researchers also determined that an increase of 15 points in maternal intelligence more than doubled the likelihood that the child would be breast-fed. They furthermore observed that mothers who breast-fed tended to be older and more educated, and to provide a more stimulating home environment.

Despite the lack of association with children’s intelligence, breast-feeding remains important for overall growth and development, Mr. Der noted.

—Nancy Walsh