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Prevalence and vaccination status of hepatitis b surface antigenaemia among secondary school children in Onitsha

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Objectives: The aim of the study was to determine the prevalence of Hepatitis B surface antigen, sociodemographic factors and vaccination status against Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) in secondary school students in Onitsha.

Methodology: A cross sectional descriptive study in secondary school's students in Onitsha, South East Nigeria was carried out. The subjects were recruited using a multi-staged sampling technique and their HBsAg status was determined using the Monalisa™ HBsAg Ultra ELISA kit. They were given pre-tested questionnaires to fill at home with their parents and return.

Results: Of the 751 students assessed, 57 were sero-positive to HBsAg giving a prevalence rate of 7.6%. The sero-prevalence was highest in the age group 14-16years, more in males than females and lower in the high socioeconomic classes. Only 4.3% of the study group had received HBV vaccination and 93% of those who were seropositive to HBsAg had not received the protective vaccination.

Conclusion: High endemicity of Hepatitis B in the study population is a matter of grave concern and requires urgent action if Nigeria is to meet up with the WHO global hepatitis strategy of eliminating viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. Asymptomatic HBV infection makes these children susceptible to chronic complications and they can become reservoirs for horizontal transmission. The introduction of routine testing for HBV in the school health program at the point of entry, prompt treatment of infected individuals and vaccination of unvaccinated adolescents and high risk groups against HBV will be an effective way of controlling the high prevalence of HBV infection in this population.

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