

Letter to the Editor Regarding the Article “Salmonellosis in Children at a Portuguese Hospital: A Retrospective Study”

Carta ao Editor Relativa ao Artigo “Salmoneloses em Crianças num Hospital Português: Um Estudo Retrospectivo”

Keywords: Child; Portugal; Salmonella Infections
Palavras-chave: Criança; Infecções por Salmonella; Portugal

To the Editor,

It was with great interest that we read the article “Salmonellosis in Children at a Portuguese Hospital: A Retrospective Study”,¹ published in your journal in February 2023.

Despite a thorough literature review and a well implemented methodology of data collection and analysis, we feel that several important findings of this study were not stressed enough or could lead to inaccurate conclusions.

The authors did not clearly describe how they obtained information on notifications. Nevertheless, they have found a notification rate for Salmonella infections of only 27%, and suggested that some of the reasons for that could be that many cases are not recognized during the initial assessment, are discharged early or have late laboratory results. This would mean that, after collection of a specimen for laboratory diagnosis, there could be a chance that no clinician would ever access the result. In that case, maybe we should firstly re-evaluate the procedures established for sample collection. Clinicians have an opportunity to notify a case when reviewing the laboratory results for each patient, which is, as stated by the authors, mandatory in our country.

Additionally, and well aligned with this low notification rate, the authors noticed that the rate of hospitalized cases in Portugal is very high, according to the ECDC Annual Epidemiological Report, but did not relate the two. Indeed, and despite not providing the real number of notifications in the study, 27% of 63 cases corresponds to 17 notifications, which is the exact number of hospitalized cases that were notified. Therefore, and with no reason to believe that the hospital where this study was carried out is significantly different from others in our country, the main reason behind such a high hospitalization rate is most likely the low notification rate.

The authors also proposed that a prospective national study should be carried out in order to ascertain the real incidence rate of salmonellosis in Portugal. Such a study may not be the best methodological approach. Firstly, the real incidence rate of salmonellosis is impossible to ascertain. On one hand, as mentioned by the authors, not all cases seek medical care, meaning that a real incidence rate would require active case finding in the general population, which is impractical. On the other hand, this hypothetical study would need to be maintained continuously, with the inherent costs and redundancy given a surveillance system (SINAVE) that is already implemented, and which includes mandatory notification of salmonellosis infections.

Our understanding is that a complete case notification would solve the question of what the real incidence rate of salmonellosis in Portugal is in those seeking medical care, and it would also answer the questions regarding the most frequent strains and patterns of antibiotic resistance. Therefore, we would deem more important to assess the reasons behind such a low notification rate than to propose an alternative surveillance method.

Most of the reasons behind a low notification rate are usually informally discussed among clinicians. However, there is limited published data regarding the constraints felt by medical professionals concerning the surveillance systems of mandatory notifiable diseases in Portugal. Our opinion on the subject is that such studies are essential to lead the way towards better reporting and higher quality data that may address pertinent questions such as those raised by the authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MMC: Drafting of the manuscript.

CG, NC, DG: Critical review and approval of the final version of the manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Manuel MARQUES DA CRUZ¹, Cláudia GOUVINHAS¹, Nuno CARNEIRO¹, Diana GUIMARÃES¹

1. Unidade de Saúde Pública Douro I. Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde Marão e Douro Norte. Vila Real. Portugal.

✉ **Autor correspondente:** Manuel Marques da Cruz. mcruz@arsnorte.min-saude.pt

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