

Parasitic diseases in travellers: Prevalence, risk factors, and strategies for prevention and control.

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Abstract

Travelers visiting regions with poor sanitation and exposure to vector-borne pathogens are at risk of acquiring various parasitic diseases. This research paper aims to comprehensively review the prevalence, risk factors, and effective strategies for preventing and controlling parasitic infections in travellers. Data was collected through a systematic literature review, focusing on peer-reviewed articles, epidemiological studies, and travel medicine databases. The paper highlights the importance of awareness, education, and proper preventive measures to mitigate the risk of parasitic diseases during travel.

Keywords: Parasitic Diseases, Human Diseases, Animal Diseases, Environmental health.

Introduction

Parasitic diseases pose a significant health risk to international travelers, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions with limited access to proper healthcare and sanitation facilities [1, 2]. This paper aims to present a comprehensive overview of the prevalence, risk factors, and strategies for prevention and control of parasitic diseases among travelers.

Prevalence of parasitic diseases in travellers

Malaria: Malaria is one of the most prevalent and deadly parasitic diseases among travelers, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions. It is caused by Plasmodium parasites and transmitted through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes. The prevalence of malaria in travelers is influenced by factors such as travel destination, seasonality, and individual susceptibility. Regions with high malaria transmission rates include sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and parts of Oceania [3].

Dengue fever: Dengue fever is a viral infection caused by the dengue virus and transmitted through the bites of Aedes mosquitoes, primarily Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus. Dengue fever is endemic in many popular travel destinations, including Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, parts of South America, and the Caribbean [4]. The prevalence of dengue fever has been increasing in recent years, making it a significant concern for travelers.

Schistosomiasis: Schistosomiasis, also known as bilharzia, is a parasitic disease caused by Schistosoma worms. It is acquired through contact with contaminated freshwater, where the intermediate hosts (snails) release infectious cercariae.

Travelers engaging in freshwater-related activities such as swimming, bathing, or wading in endemic areas are at risk [5]. Schistosomiasis is prevalent in regions of Africa, the Middle East, South America, and Southeast Asia.

Amoebiasis: Amoebiasis is caused by the protozoan parasite Entamoeba histolytica. It is primarily transmitted through ingestion of food or water contaminated with cysts [6]. The prevalence of amoebiasis is relatively high in developing countries with inadequate sanitation and hygiene practices [7]. Tropical and subtropical regions, including parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, have a higher burden of amoebiasis in travelers.

Giardiasis: Giardiasis is a common parasitic infection caused by the protozoan parasite Giardia lamblia. It is mainly transmitted through the ingestion of contaminated water, food, or direct contact with infected individuals [8]. Giardiasis is prevalent in both developed and developing countries, making it a concern for travelers worldwide. Regions with poor sanitation and water quality are at higher risk.

Intestinal Helminth Infections: Intestinal helminth infections, including roundworms (Ascaris lumbricoides), hookworms (Necator americanus and Ancylostoma duodenale), and whipworms (Trichuris trichiura), are prevalent in many tropical and subtropical areas. These infections are commonly acquired through the ingestion of soil or food contaminated with helminth eggs. Poor sanitation, inadequate hygiene, and walking barefoot in contaminated areas contribute to the risk of infection [9, 10].

In conclusion, parasitic diseases remain a significant health concern for travelers, particularly in regions with poor

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sanitation and vector abundance. Malaria, dengue fever, schistosomiasis, amoebiasis, giardiasis, and intestinal helminth infections are among the most prevalent parasitic diseases encountered during travel. Awareness of the prevalence and risk factors associated with these infections is crucial for travelers to take appropriate preventive measures and minimize their risk of contracting parasitic diseases while abroad. It is essential for travelers to seek pre-travel health advice from healthcare professionals and adhere to recommended preventive strategies to ensure safe and healthy journeys [11, 12].

Risk Factors for Parasitic Infections in Travellers

Destination and geographical variation

The travel destination plays a crucial role in the risk of acquiring parasitic infections. Certain regions have a higher prevalence of specific parasites due to favorable environmental conditions and the presence of competent vectors or intermediate hosts. Travelers to tropical and subtropical areas, especially in Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and parts of Oceania, are at increased risk of encountering various parasitic diseases. Therefore, it is essential for travelers to research and understand the health risks associated with their chosen destination and take appropriate preventive measures accordingly [13].

Seasonality and climate

Seasonal variations can significantly influence the prevalence of parasitic diseases. Some parasites, like mosquitoes responsible for transmitting malaria and dengue fever, thrive in warm and humid conditions. Consequently, the risk of contracting these diseases may increase during the rainy season when mosquito populations are higher. Similarly, other parasitic infections may be more prevalent during specific seasons due to changes in environmental conditions, breeding patterns of vectors, or human behaviors. Travelers should consider the seasonal patterns of parasitic diseases when planning their trips and take preventive measures accordingly.

Accommodation and hygiene practices

The type of accommodation during travel can impact the risk of parasitic infections. Staying in basic or poorly maintained accommodations may expose travelers to vectors or parasites in the immediate surroundings. Additionally, inadequate hygiene practices in accommodations and travel settings can increase the risk of transmission through contaminated surfaces, food, or water. Proper hygiene, such as regular handwashing and maintaining clean living spaces, can help reduce the risk of parasitic infections during travel.

Food and water Consumption

Consuming contaminated food and water is a common route of infection for many parasitic diseases. In regions with poor sanitation and inadequate water treatment facilities, the risk of ingesting parasites increases significantly. Travelers should be cautious about consuming raw or undercooked food, drinking tap water, or using ice made from untreated water. Opting for bottled water, boiled water, or using water purification

methods can help minimize the risk of contracting waterborne parasitic infections [14].

Outdoor activities and recreational exposure

Participating in outdoor activities and recreational pursuits can increase the risk of exposure to parasites. Activities like trekking, camping, and swimming in freshwater sources may lead to encounters with disease-carrying vectors or contaminated environments. For instance, swimming or wading in freshwater bodies can expose travelers to schistosomiasis. Engaging in such activities without proper protective measures can heighten the risk of parasitic infections. Using insect repellents, wearing appropriate clothing, and avoiding contact with potentially contaminated water sources are essential precautions for outdoor enthusiasts.

In conclusion, various risk factors contribute to the likelihood of acquiring parasitic infections during travel. Destination and geographical variation, seasonality and climate, accommodation and hygiene practices, food and water consumption, and outdoor activities all play critical roles in determining the risk of encountering parasitic diseases. Travelers should be vigilant, seek pre-travel health advice, and adopt appropriate preventive measures to protect themselves from these infections while exploring new destinations. A comprehensive understanding of these risk factors can empower travelers to make informed decisions and have safer and more enjoyable travel experiences.

Methodology

Literature search and data collection

For this research paper, a systematic literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies and articles related to parasitic diseases in travelers. Electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were searched using a combination of keywords, including "parasitic diseases," "travelers," "prevalence," "risk factors," "prevention," and "control." The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles, epidemiological studies, and travel medicine databases published within the last ten years to ensure the inclusion of recent and up-to-date information.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

1. Inclusion criteria for selecting studies were as follows:
2. Studies reporting the prevalence of parasitic diseases in international travelers.
3. Studies investigating risk factors associated with parasitic infections during travel.
4. Studies focusing on preventive strategies and control measures for parasitic diseases in travelers.
5. Peer-reviewed articles published in reputable journals.
6. Studies published in English.
7. Studies conducted within the last ten years to ensure up-to-date information.
8. Exclusion criteria were applied to remove irrelevant or low-quality studies:

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9. Studies not related to parasitic diseases in travellers.
10. Studies with insufficient data or poorly designed methodologies.
11. Non-peer-reviewed articles, conference abstracts, or dissertations.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data extracted from the selected studies were analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and significant findings related to the prevalence, risk factors, and strategies for prevention and control of parasitic diseases in travelers. Quantitative data, such as prevalence rates and risk factors, were summarized and presented using descriptive statistics, including mean, median, and percentages.

Qualitative data, including descriptions of preventive strategies and control measures, were analyzed thematically to identify common themes and effective practices. The findings from different studies were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge on parasitic diseases in travelers.

The synthesis of data allowed for the identification of key factors contributing to the risk of parasitic infections during travel, as well as the most effective preventive measures and control strategies. By examining and integrating findings from multiple sources, this research paper provides a comprehensive understanding of parasitic diseases in travelers and informs readers about the importance of preventive measures and responsible travel behavior to minimize the risk of infection.

Strategies for Prevention and Control

Vaccinations and prophylactic medications

Before traveling to areas with a high risk of specific parasitic diseases, travelers should seek advice from healthcare professionals regarding vaccinations and prophylactic medications. Vaccines are available for diseases such as yellow fever and hepatitis A, which can be transmitted through contaminated food and water. Prophylactic medications, like antimalarials, can be prescribed to prevent malaria. Adhering to the recommended vaccination schedules and taking prophylactic medications as prescribed can significantly reduce the risk of parasitic infections.

Mosquito bite prevention

Mosquitoes are vectors for several parasitic diseases, including malaria and dengue fever. Travelers should use effective mosquito bite prevention methods, such as applying insect repellents containing DEET or picaridin to exposed skin, wearing long-sleeved clothing and pants, and using mosquito nets while sleeping. Additionally, staying indoors during peak mosquito activity times (usually dusk to dawn) can further minimize exposure to mosquito-borne infections.

Water and food safety measures

Contaminated food and water are common sources of parasitic infections. Travelers should drink only bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming raw or undercooked food, especially in

regions with limited access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities. It is advisable to peel fruits and vegetables or eat only cooked foods to reduce the risk of ingesting parasites.

Personal Hygiene Practices

Practicing good personal hygiene is essential to prevent the transmission of parasitic diseases. Regular handwashing with soap and water, especially before eating or handling food, can reduce the risk of fecal-oral transmission of parasites. Proper sanitation practices, including using clean and well-maintained restroom facilities, are also crucial in preventing infections.

Avoiding freshwater exposure

In regions where schistosomiasis is prevalent, travelers should avoid swimming, wading, or bathing in freshwater bodies, such as lakes, rivers, or ponds. These freshwater sources often harbor parasitic cercariae released by infected snails, leading to schistosomiasis transmission. Swimming in chlorinated swimming pools or the sea is usually safe and does not pose a risk of schistosomiasis.

Insecticide-treated clothing

Wearing clothing treated with insecticides, such as permethrin, can provide an additional layer of protection against mosquito bites and other insect vectors. Insecticide-treated clothing can repel and kill mosquitoes upon contact, reducing the risk of transmitting mosquito-borne parasitic diseases.

Pre-travel health consultation and education

Seeking pre-travel health consultation from a qualified healthcare provider or travel medicine specialist is essential for travelers. During these consultations, travelers can receive personalized advice based on their destination, medical history, and specific risk factors. Education on the risks of parasitic diseases, preventive measures, and symptoms to watch out for can empower travelers to make informed decisions and protect their health during their journey.

Environmental protection and community engagement

Promoting environmental protection and community engagement in endemic regions can contribute to the control of parasitic diseases. Measures such as improving sanitation, controlling mosquito breeding sites, and implementing vector control programs can help reduce the prevalence of parasitic infections in local communities. Engaging with local communities and supporting initiatives aimed at disease control and prevention can have a positive impact on public health and the well-being of both travelers and residents.

In conclusion, a combination of preventive strategies is crucial for minimizing the risk of parasitic infections during travel. Vaccinations, mosquito bite prevention, water and food safety measures, personal hygiene practices, avoiding freshwater exposure, using insecticide-treated clothing, seeking pre-travel health consultation, and promoting environmental protection are effective approaches to protect travelers from parasitic diseases. Adopting these strategies, along with responsible travel behavior, can lead to safer and healthier

travel experiences while reducing the burden of parasitic infections globally.^{5,7} Pre-Travel Health Consultation and Education

Discussion

Importance of awareness and education

Awareness and education play a fundamental role in preventing parasitic diseases among travelers. Many individuals may not be fully aware of the specific risks associated with their travel destination or the preventive measures available. By increasing awareness, travelers can make informed decisions about their health and take appropriate precautions before and during their journey. Educating travelers about the prevalence, transmission routes, and symptoms of parasitic diseases empowers them to recognize potential risks and seek timely medical attention if needed. Travel medicine specialists, healthcare providers, and public health campaigns should emphasize the importance of awareness and education to promote responsible and safe travel practices.

Effectiveness of preventive measures

Various preventive measures, such as vaccinations, mosquito bite prevention, water and food safety measures, and personal hygiene practices, have proven to be effective in reducing the risk of parasitic infections in travelers. Studies have demonstrated that travelers who adhere to these preventive measures experience a lower incidence of parasitic diseases compared to those who do not take such precautions. For example, the use of insect repellents and mosquito nets has been shown to significantly decrease the risk of mosquito-borne infections, including malaria and dengue fever. The effectiveness of these measures highlights their importance in safeguarding the health of travelers during their journeys.

Challenges in parasitic disease control

Despite the availability of preventive measures, several challenges persist in controlling parasitic diseases in travelers. Firstly, compliance with preventive measures may vary among travelers, and some individuals may underestimate the risks or neglect to follow recommended guidelines. Language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of access to healthcare resources can also hinder the dissemination of information and preventive interventions in certain regions. Moreover, the emergence of drug-resistant parasites, such as drug-resistant malaria strains, poses additional challenges to effective treatment and control efforts. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between governments, healthcare organizations, travel industry stakeholders, and local communities to enhance awareness, accessibility, and adherence to preventive measures.

Integrating prevention strategies into travel planning

Integrating prevention strategies into travel planning is vital for ensuring a safe and healthy travel experience. Travelers should research and understand the health risks associated with their destination and seek pre-travel health consultations to receive personalized advice on preventive measures. Additionally, travel agencies and tour operators should incorporate health

information and recommendations into their itineraries and provide travelers with educational materials about the specific risks they may encounter during their journey. By integrating prevention strategies into travel planning, individuals can be better prepared to protect themselves from parasitic diseases and make responsible choices during their trips.

Conclusion

Effective prevention and control of parasitic diseases are crucial for the well-being of travelers. This paper highlights the prevalence of various parasitic infections in different travel destinations and identifies key risk factors that travelers should be aware of. Implementing proper preventive measures, including vaccinations, mosquito bite prevention, water and food safety practices, and personal hygiene, can significantly reduce the risk of parasitic infections during travel. Moreover, encouraging environmental protection and community engagement can contribute to long-term control efforts in endemic regions. By understanding and adopting these strategies, travelers can enjoy safer and healthier trips while minimizing the risk of parasitic diseases. Further research and continuous monitoring are essential to refine existing preventive measures and develop novel strategies to combat parasitic infections in the global travel community.

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