Early-life innate immunity to respiratory infection.

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Abstract

Early life is a time when infants are especially vulnerable to respiratory infections, and their symptoms are much more severe than in adults. Most aspects of the newborn immune system are thought to be defective; innate responses are weak, antigen-presenting cells have low immunostimulatory activity, and adaptive lymphocyte responses are limited, all of which contribute to poor immunological memory and suboptimal vaccine responses. The ability to distinguish between harmless and potentially dangerous antigens is critical for mucosal surfaces such as the lung, which are constantly exposed to airborne antigen and potential pathogenic invasion, to prevent inflammation that could lead to loss of gaseous exchange and damage to developing lung tissue.

Keywords: Respiratory infections, Immune system, Neonates, Lungs.

Introduction

One of the top causes of death in children under the age of five is respiratory illness. The illness is usually limited to the upper respiratory tract, but it can progress to a serious lower respiratory tract infection, such as RSV bronchiolitis, which is the primary cause of newborn hospitalization globally. Early life is a window of special risk to respiratory illness because maternal antibodies provide some protection against infection but diminish over the first months of life, and neonates and babies respond poorly to vaccination. Experiences during the critical newborn and infant window may have a long-term impact on respiratory health. Severe RSV infection in babies is linked to the development of wheeze and asthma in childhood, and even late-life respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are linked to early life events [1].

At birth, the neonate emerges from the safe confines of the uterus to face a slew of antigenic assaults from pathogens, commensals, and harmless environmental antigens. In comparison to adult immunity, neonatal immunity is generally weakened [2].

Early Childhood Respiratory Immunity: Because obtaining samples from the lower airways of healthy infants is difficult, numerous researches have been conducted using murine and other animal models. Study of bronchoalveolar lavage fluid composition, immunohistochemistry, and, more recently, thorough phenotypic analysis of leukocyte subsets in paediatric tissues have all provided information on the cellular composition of the neonatal lung in humans [3].

Factors Affecting Lung Immunity Development and Maturation: Despite the lack of a mature adult-like immune system, neonates are capable of producing powerful immune responses that protect them from infection, and excessive inflammation can ensue. The neonate must find a balance between infection protection and potential lung injury, and may use anti-infection systems other than those found in adults [4].

As evidenced by the mitigation of allergic lung inflammation caused by airway exposure to LPS or endotoxin-rich dust samples, environmental microbial exposure may influence lung health by determining the set-point of immunological reactivity of the lung [5].

Conclusion

The mechanisms that control inflammatory responses in the lungs in response to microbial stimulation need to be better understood. In order to create newborn vaccinations and therapies for increased respiratory inflammation during infection, we need to learn more about how the growing immune system responds to viral challenge. The immune system in early life is capable of adult-level responses in some conditions, so possibly increasing responses in at-risk infants as part of an acute infectious disease treatment or as an adjuvant for vaccination would be a desirable protective strategy.

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