Incidence of Norovirus-Associated Diarrhea, Shanghai, China, 2012–2013

Jianxing Yu,† Chuchu Ye,† Shengjie Lai,† Weiping Zhu, Zike Zhang, Qibin Geng, Caoyi Xue, Weizhong Yang, Shuyu Wu, Aaron J. Hall, Qiao Sun, Zhongjie Li

We conducted sentinel-based surveillance for norovirus in the Pudong area of Shanghai, China, during 2012–2013, by analyzing 5,324 community surveys, 408,024 medical records, and 771 laboratory-confirmed norovirus infections among 3,877 diarrhea cases. Our analysis indicated an outpatient incidence of 1.5/100 person-years and a community incidence of 8.9/100 person-years for norovirus-associated diarrhea.

Norovirus is the most common cause of gastroenteritis (i.e., diarrhea or vomiting) (1). Diarrhea represents the second greatest burden of infectious disease in the world, and globally, >20% of diarrhea cases are associated with norovirus infection (2). China is one of the 15 highest-burden countries for diarrhea in the world (3). To guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of disease control programs, nationwide sentinel-based surveillance for diarrhea across all age groups has been conducted in China since 2009, in which the prevalence of norovirus is monitored regularly (4). However, incidence rates of norovirus are not readily available from previous studies because of the lack of population denominators (4,5). To assess the

Author affiliations: Division of Infectious Disease, Key Laboratory of Surveillance and Early-Warning on Infectious Disease, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Beijing, China (J. Yu, S. Lai, Z. Zhang, Q. Geng, W. Yang, Z. Li); Ministry of Health Key Laboratory of Systems Biology of Pathogens and Dr. Christophe Mérieux Laboratory, CAMS-Fondation Mérieux, Institute of Pathogen Biology, Academy of Medical Sciences of China and Peking Union Medical College, Beijing (J. Yu); Research Base of Key Laboratory of Surveillance and Early-Warning on Infectious Disease, Pudong New Area Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Shanghai, China (C. Ye, W. Zhu, C. Xue, Q. Sun); State Key Laboratory for Diagnosis and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, First Affiliated Hospital, Zhejiang University School of Medicine, Hangzhou, China (Z. Zhang); State Key Laboratory of Virology, Wuhan University College of Life Sciences, Wuhan, China (Q. Geng); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Beijing, China (S. Wu); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, USA (A.J. Hall)

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†These authors contributed equally to this article.
eligibility of enrollment; the first 1–3 eligible diarrhea case-patients for each week in each sentinel hospital were recruited by using a convenience sampling method. Fecal specimens were collected for enrolled case-patients and tested for norovirus genogroups GI and GII in the local public health laboratory by using reverse transcription PCR (RT-PCR) assays as described previously (4). In total, we enrolled 3,877 diarrhea case-patients (2,235 in 2012 and 1,642 in 2013). We detected norovirus in 771 cases (19.9%). We observed no significant difference in norovirus detection between surveillance years (19% in 2012 vs. 21% in 2013). However, detection of norovirus was significantly different between age groups (22% in persons >5 years of age vs. 12% in children <5 years of age; p<0.001) (Table 1). The highest norovirus detection rates were in October (35%–38%) and the lowest in June (5%–6%), but a secondary peak in detection occurred in March (19%–34%) (Figure 2).

We calculated outpatient incidence rates for norovirus-associated diarrhea in Pudong as the number of outpatient visits associated with norovirus divided by the total population at risk, which was based on total episodes of AGE in sentinel hospitals, the contractive factor used to narrow down the total episodes of ICD-10–coded AGE to diarrhea cases likely meeting the study case definition, the percentage of diarrhea case-patients with norovirus, and the total study catchment population. We estimated community incidence rates by dividing the number of outpatient visits associated with norovirus by the product of population at risk and the proportion of persons with diarrhea in the community who sought medical care, based on results of the Hospital Utilization and Attitudes Survey. We calculated 95% CIs by using bootstrap methods with 1,000 samples for each rate.

We estimated the annual outpatient incidence rates of norovirus-associated diarrhea in Pudong to be 1.3/100 person-years (95% CI 1.2–1.4) in 2012 and 1.6/100 person-years (95% CI 1.4–1.8) in 2013, with an average rate of 1.5/100 person-years (95% CI 1.4–1.6) for the 2 years combined (Table 2). Children <2 years of age (7.4/100 person-years, 95% CI 5.4–9.3) and adults >65 years of age (2.6/100 person-years, 95% CI 2.0–3.2) exhibited increased rates of outpatient visits, compared with adults 25–44 years of age (1.0/100 person-years, 95% CI 0.9–1.1) (Table 2). The annual community incidence rates for norovirus-associated diarrhea were 8.1/100 person-years (95% CI 7.2–9.0) in 2012 and 9.8/100 person-years (95% CI 8.7–11.0) in 2013, with an average rate of 8.9/100 person-years (95% CI 8.2–9.7) for the 2 years combined.

**Conclusions**
This 2-year study provides age-stratified incidence rates for norovirus infections among medically attended diarrhea

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**Table 1.** Norovirus test results among diarrhea case-patients, by sex, surveillance year, and age group, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China, 2012–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Positive, no. (%)</th>
<th>Negative, no. (%)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>771 (100)</td>
<td>3,106 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>426 (21)</td>
<td>1,646 (79)</td>
<td>0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>345 (19)</td>
<td>1,460 (81)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surveillance year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>422 (19)</td>
<td>1,813 (81)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>349 (21)</td>
<td>1,293 (79)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–11 mo</td>
<td>30 (10)</td>
<td>277 (90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–23 mo</td>
<td>23 (16)</td>
<td>124 (84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–59 mo</td>
<td>28 (13)</td>
<td>184 (87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–24 y</td>
<td>69 (18)</td>
<td>306 (82)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–44 y</td>
<td>268 (21)</td>
<td>1,028 (79)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–64 y</td>
<td>263 (24)</td>
<td>828 (76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;65 y</td>
<td>90 (20)</td>
<td>359 (80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Registration, enrollment, and testing of diarrhea case-patients in Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China, 2012–2013. (A pilot study was conducted during the first month of the year 2012. No case enrollment was conducted during that period.) AGE, acute gastroenteritis; ICD-10, International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision.

**Figure 2.** Proportion of norovirus detected among diarrhea case-patients in outpatient settings, by month of symptom onset, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China, 2012–2013.
patients in Pudong, Shanghai. We used a sentinel-based surveillance approach and combined multiple data sources to generate incidence, including 5,324 community surveys, 408,024 retrospectively collected electronic medical records, and 771 laboratory-confirmed norovirus infections identified among 3,877 diarrhea cases. Each year in Pudong, >1 in 11 persons became ill with norovirus-associated diarrhea in the community (corresponding to 526,000 ambulatory visits). These findings suggest that norovirus was a substantial burden on the community and healthcare system of Pudong.

In our study, outpatient rates of norovirus-associated diarrhea were consistent between the 2 consecutive surveillance years of 2012 and 2013. The average annual incidence for norovirus-associated outpatient visits was estimated to be 1.5/100 person-years, which was broadly consistent although slightly higher than that reported in studies conducted in other countries, such as the United States (0.4–1.2/100 person-years) (6), the United Kingdom (0.48–0.6/100 person-years) (7), Germany (0.29–1.07/100 person-years) (8), and the Netherlands (0.5–1.5/100 person-years) (9). The average prevalence of norovirus across all age groups in our study was 19.9%, similar to the global estimate of 20% from outpatient studies by Ahmed et al. (2). This prevalence was higher when compared with some other studies that were conducted in other countries (4.4%–16%) (6–8). We believe that high exposure to norovirus in our study population might have been one of the elevated rates. The new norovirus GII.4 variant Sydney_2012 emerged during our study period and has caused several outbreaks in eastern China since 2012 (10,11). Although sequencing information was lacking in our study and we have only 2 years of surveillance data, given the elevated rates and substantial burden of norovirus in our study population, we should remain vigilant and continue to monitor norovirus, ideally with genotype information, in future studies.

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Dr. Yu is an epidemiologist at Institute of Pathogen Biology, Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College in China. Dr. Yu’s work focuses on the epidemiology of enteric and respiratory viral infections, including norovirus and rotavirus.

References

Addresses for correspondence: Zhongjie Li, Division of Infectious Disease, Key Laboratory of Surveillance and Early-Warning on Infectious Disease, Center for Disease Control and Prevention of China, 155 Changbai Rd, Changping District, Beijing, China, 102206; email: lizj@chinacdc.cn; Qiao Sun, Shanghai Pudong New Area Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 3039 Zhangyang Rd, Shanghai, China, 200136; email: qsun@pdcdc.sh.cn

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- Cutaneous Legionella longbeachae Infection in Immunosuppressed Woman, United Kingdom
- Bartonella spp. and Coxiella burnetii Associated with Community-Acquired, Culture-Negative Endocarditis, Brazil

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