

INTESTINAL INFECTIONS: THEIR EPIDEMIOLOGY, PATHOPHYSIOLOGY AND INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Intestinal infections pose a major public health concern worldwide, especially in areas with substandard sanitation, inadequate hygiene practices, and contaminated drinking water. The infections stemming from bacterial, viral, and parasitic agents inflict severe consequences on health and cause morbidity and mortality in young children, elderly populations as well as the immunocompromised. Recent epidemiological research has shown that diarrheal diseases, heavily associated with intestinal infections, are responsible for more than 1.6 million deaths each year, mostly in low and middle-income countries.

This research pursuit aims to provide a detailed epidemiology of intestinal infections regarding the global burden of disease, risk factors, pathways of transmission, and clinical features. It also attempts to assess the contribution of antimicrobial resistance, climate changes, and socio-economic gap inequities to the disease burden. This article assesses public health programs, such as vaccination projects and sanitation and disease surveillance systems.

Studying the available literature, this article underscores the need to design and implement an integrated multi-sectoral response to intestinal infections.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Summary

Pathogenic bacteria, viruses and parasites that affect the gastrointestinal tract can result in an intestinal infection. Contaminated water and inadequate medical services leads to developing nations facing more difficulties with intestinal infections when compared to underdeveloped countries.

One of the important protective measures is to gain a broader insight into the epidemiology of the disease in order to form good prevention and control measures. The intensity of intestinal infections ranges from mild cases that resolve without treatment to debilitating diarrhea that endangers life and needs hospitalization. Diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and fever are common symptoms. Severe dehydration can be extremely dangerous for children under five years old and the elderly, which can result in death.

In spite of significant progress in medicine, factors like antimicrobial resistance (AMR) urbanization, climate change, and greater international travel serves as a challenge to medicine's efforts in solving the global issue that is intestinal infections.

Intestinal infections and their burden worldwide

40% of cases of diarrhea globally are associated with inadequate sanitation in and around LMIC or Low-Middle Income Countries, along with the consumption of contaminated drinking water and food. High income countries deal with outbreaks caused by food vector pathogens along with antimicrobial resistant strains, which poses a huge risk to one's health.

Socioeconomic and Environmental Factors

The social and economic context, along with geographical factors, make sure that intestinal infections continue to prevail globally due to the reasons listed below.

- Clean drinking water is unattainable: Over two billion people in the world do not have safe drinking water.
- Sanitation is low: People practicing open defecation, as well as poor waste management, heighten the chances of transmitting diseases.
- Nutritional deficiency: Weakens defense of the body making, children and older people more vulnerable.
- Urbanization and population explosion: The rapid growth of people living in urban slums helps spread infections.
- Change of climate: Increased temperature and harsh weather conditions impact the survival and distribution of pathogens.

Aside from fostering the spread of intestinal infections, the above mentioned socio-economic factors allows the poor communities to remain in a constant state of infection.

Historical Perspective and Evolution of Disease Understanding

Simple records show that our ancestors were infected with intestinal diseases for a long period of time. The earliest records mention the infamous dysentery, cholera and typhoid fever which affected entire civilizations. Some crucial historical events that had die straight impact or relevance to intestinal disease include:

- Egypt (ancient period, 1550 years B.C.): The Ebers papyrus is one of the oldest medical texts, which profoundly analyzes diarrhea, discussing abnormal conditions and diseases, such as diarrhea along with diseases and their herbal treatment.
- 1854 Cholera Outbreak (London): Dr. John Snow is credited with discovering the source of cholera came from contaminated drinking water, consequently coining the term epidemiology years later.
- 20th-Century Vaccine Developments: Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) and rotavirus vaccines greatly increased the chances of surviving pediatric diarrhea diseases.
- Recent AMR Crisis (21st Century): The current challenge of antimicrobial resistance has made the management of once-easily-treatable intestinal infections increasingly complex.

Knowing the history of the pattern of decline of intestinal infection gives one an appreciation of how medicine and public health evolved and what they worked on, as well as what they need to accomplish next.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This research aims to:

1. Assess the epidemiology of global intestinal infections focusing on at-risk populations and geographic areas.
2. Determine the contribution of different pathogens to disease causation and transmission.
3. Analyze the role of ecological, social, economic, and behavioral variables on the prevalence of infections.
4. Appraise public health measures undertaken such as vaccination and improvement of sanitary conditions.
5. Investigate the impact of AMR or climate change in the variation of diseases.

Research Questions:

Which intestinal pathogens are of the greatest concern globally and how do they vary by region?

What is the impact of the socio-economic environment on the burden of disease?

Which public health interventions have been successful in the control of intestinal infections?

What impact is antimicrobial resistance having on the treatment of various diseases?

In what ways does climate change contribute to the anticipated increase in the prevalence of intestinal infections?

Through analyzing these questions, this research aims to thoroughly investigate intestinal infections and provide suggestions on how to manage and control the infection in a rational manner.

Microbiology of Intestinal Infections

Infections of the intestines are brought about by a complex array of bacterial, viral, and parasitic organisms that affect the human digestive system. The most common ways that these pathogens disseminate are through ingestion of contaminated food or water, or through direct fecal-oral contact. Every pathogen has its own distinct Infection, pathogenesis, and disease progress cycle.

This section analyzes the most prominent microbial agents leading to intestinal infections as well as their mechanisms of pathogenicity at global scale.

2. BACTERIAL PATHOGENS

Bacterial infection to the intestines represents a leading cause of diarrhea in many countries. Among the common bacterial pathogens are:

1. E. coli- enteric pathotypes

E. coli is a gram-negative bacterium, the negative side is certain strains are pathogenic to human. They are:

Enterotoxigenic E. coli (ETEC): Causes traveler's diarrhea and child diarrhea in developing countries by excreting heat labile and heat stable toxins which triggers fluid secretion.

Enterohemorrhagic E. coli (EHEC): Commonly known as E. Coli O157:H7, the one that produces shiga toxin and causes Matched Sentence:

Enteropathogenic E. coli (EPEC): Mainly affects infants, causing diarrhea that is thin in nature. It also disrupts microvilli in the intestines.

Enteraggregative E. coli (EAEC): Causes irritation in the intestines leading to persistent diarrhea. This continues on for long periods of time.

Salmonella spp.

2. Typhoid and Non-Typhoid Fever:

Non-Typhoidal Salmonella (NTS): Infection initiated by eating contaminated foods such as eggs, milk, or chicken. The infection causes gastroenteritis which shows symptoms in diarrhea, vomiting, and having fever.

Typhoidal Salmonella (*S. Typhi* and *S. Paratyphi*): A more serious type of infection characterized by symptoms such as a prolonged fever along with acute abdominal pain. These infections cause diseases like typhoid fever.

3. Shigella spp. Dysenteric Shigellosis :

Shigella species (*S. sonnei*, *S. flexneri*, *S. dysenteriae*):

These bacteria cause infections like bacillary dysentery also known as shigellosis.

Toxin production causes bloody diarrhea and mucous inflammation. This leads to ulcers and other severely harmful conditions of the gastrointestinal tract.

These bacteria are infectious in nature and the infection can be passed on with a very small number of organisms.

4. Vibrio cholerae Cholera :

Causes cholera, leading to very severe diarrhea which looks very watery and the stools are often watery and white. The cholera toxin leads to gross dehydration and needs immediate counteraction.

Major outbreaks of cholera are reported in regions with scarce sanitary drinking water, particularly after cyclone or natural disasters.

5. Clostridioides difficile Hospital acquired infections :

Superinfection from *C. difficile* leads to antibiotic associated diarrhea when no antibiotics are used on patients. Pseudomembranous and antibiotic associated enterocolitis occurs when such patients are hospitalized.

Using too much antibiotics disrupts the intestinal microflora, resulting in the release of toxins and taking over by *C. difficile* overgrowth.

Viral Pathogens

Gastroenteritis is particularly problematic for children and viral infections are among its major causes. Common viral pathogens include:

Rotavirus

The most important infectious agent causing severe diarrhea among young children, leading to a considerable level of dehydration.

Causes approximately 40% of the hospitalizations due to diarrhea for children aged 5 years and below.

Has greatly reduced mortality as a result of vaccination programs.

Norovirus

Causes illness of the extreme contagious nature associated with outbreaks on cruise ships and in school and hospital settings.

Known to cause severe dehydration along with explosive vomiting and diarrhea.

Astrovirus and Adenovirus

Contributing less than other forms but still present alongside viral gastroenteritis among younger pediatrics and persons whose immune systems have been compromised.

Parasitic Pathogens

Infectious diseases remain perennial health problems to those residing in the tropical and subtropical parts of the world where people's health is caused by these. Most notable are:

Giardia lamblia (Giardiasis)

A flagellated protozoan that causes chronic diarrhea along with severe malabsorption resulting in marked weight loss.

Infecting via contaminated water and food sources.

Entamoeba histolytica (Amoebiasis)

The organism is countable as one of the members capable of causing bloody diarrhea known as amoebic dysentery. Associated with likelihood of liver abscess.

Contracted by fecal oral routes or by infected foods or liquids.

Cryptosporidium spp. (Cryptosporidiosis)

Diarrhea is one of the symptoms presented alongside severe dehydration that is commonly known as HIV/AIDS.

Has shown resistance to chlorine therefore making water unpotable.

3. GLOBAL EPIDEMIOLOGY AND TRANSMISSION PATTERNS

Based on social economic status, environment, and health care facilities, the epidemiology of intestinal infections differs from one region to the next.

Regional Prevalence of Intestinal Infections

Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia: Most affected regions due to poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water, and malnutrition.

Latin America and Middle East: Moderately affected due to food borne transmission.

High-Income Countries: Linked to contaminated food, hospital infections, and AMR pathogens.

Transmission Routes and Risk Factors

Mode of Transmission: Foodborne Example Pathogens: Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria Main Risk Factors: Poor food handling, and undercooked meat.

Waterborne- Vibrio cholerae, Giardia, Cryptosporidium. Contaminated drinking water. Fecal-Oral Rotavirus, Shigella. Poor hygiene, open defecation.

Zoonotic Campylobacter, E. coli. Contact with livestock contaminated dairy.

Seasonal Variations in Disease Outbreaks

Rainy Seasons:

More contaminated water results in cholera and crypto burst.

Summer:

High cholera storage causes increased foodborne illness.

Winter:

Increased indoor activity causes rotavirus and norovirus peak.

4. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY AND CLINICAL SYMPTOMS OF INTESTINAL INFECTIONS

Different pathogens have their own specific pathophysiology, which stems from how the pathogen, its virulence factors, and the host's immune response comes together. There are, however, some common mechanisms seen in most infections including: the invasion of the mucosa, the production of toxins, and the disruption of the microflora.

This section will analyze the disease processes of bacterial, viral, and parasitic infections of the intestines with a focus on the clinical symptoms and complications that follow these infections.

Mechanisms of Pathogenesis

Intestinal infections in a host can be caused by pathogens through five distinct ways.

Toxin Production

Certain viruses and bacteria can synthesize and release toxins which breach the intestinal barrier causing fluid loss, and diarrhea.

Example: Cholera toxin released by vibrio cholerae leads to severe diarrhea due to the raise of chloride secretion.

Clostridioides difficile also releases enterotoxins A and B which leads to damage of colonic mucosa.

Direct Invasion of Intestinal Mucosa

These pathogens can also have the ability to breach and damage the epithelial layer leading to dysentery (bloody diarrhea).

Example: Shigella and Salmonella instigate strong inflammatory reactions by invading intestinal cells.

Attachment and Effacement of Enterocytes

Enterobacteriaceae E coli, or EPEC, attach themselves to intestinal livestock and cause m- disruption.

Clinical Details of Intestinal Infections

Symptoms relating to intestinal infection may include complaints of discomfort, severe dehydration, systemic toxicity, and in worse case scenarios even lead to death.

Causes and Types of Diarrhea

Characteristic, Common Pathogens, and Causes, Type of Diarrhea

Excessive non-bloody watery diarrhea leads to dehydration. Common pathogens include vibrio cholerae, ETEC, and rotaviruses., Acute, Sudden Diarrhea

Stool with mucus and blood coupled with abdominal pain. Shigella, EHEC, and Entamoeba histolytica are the common pathogens., Sub-Acute Bloody Diarrhea

Lasting malabsorption coupled with significant weightloss spread over a month or more illustrates chronic Diarrhea. The gram negative pathogens include giardia lamblia and cryptosporidium., Diarrhea of Long duration

Symptoms Relating to Systemic Complications

Many of the above symptoms can be noticed in severe dehydration which is caused by cholera, rotavirus, or shigellosis.\ Severe Dehydration

An effect often related with e. coli O157:H7, presenting with a disruption in kidney functions following a form of anemia. Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS)

caused by Clostridioides difficile colitis, much more concise and identifiable is toxic megacolon.\ Toxic Megacolon

Invasive strains of salmonella typhi and leucinha e. coli, these pathogens often relate to severe bloodpoisoning known as septicemia.\ Septecimia

Accompanied with amoebic dysentery, entamoeba histolytica causes liver abscess., \ Liver Abscess

Modifying Factors Which Affect the Severity of the Infections

Children as well as elders have a much greatneser likelihood of facing complications with age.

The outcomes of the disease are bound to worsen with undernourishment nutritional status.

HIV/AIDS patients and recieving transplants have weak immunity which makes this group of people more vulnerable.

Have a disrupted gut microbiome or health lowers your chances of battling infections and increases your risk for most of them.

Case Study: Cholera Epidemic in Haiti (2010-2019)

Outbreak Origin: Introduced thru defiled UN peacekeeper camps, after the earthquake in 2010.

Impact: 9,700 deaths and Over 820,000 cases were reported.

Response Measures: Severe cholera outbreak was mitigated and infection transmission rate was decreased by improved sanitation, mass vaccination, and water treatment.

5. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS AND CONTROL STRATEGIES

Managing sanitation-related illnesses necessitates a combination of strategies that encompass hygiene, vaccination, rapid response, and sanitation. Public health intends to reduce and control the spread of an infection so as to lessen the burden of disease as well as prevent exorbitant-scale epidemics.

This part will delve into particular strategies, case studies, and the impact of public health Interventions in the control of infection diseases of the intestine.

Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Programs

The leading cause for intestinal infections, particularly in poorer nations, is Insufficient clean water supply and sanitation facilities. The implementation and enforcement of WASH programs led to significant decreases in morbidity and mortality due to diarrheal diseases.

Safe Drinking Water Initiatives

Chlorination:

The process of adding chlorine to drinking water, killing bacteria and viruses like Vibrio cholerae.

Filtration Systems:

The intrusion of ceramic, sand, and reverse osmosis filters.

Boiling Water:

is also the leading way of eradication of all microbial pathogens but needs fuel and throughout resources.

Cholera Reduction in Bangladesh – A Case Study

In rural Bangladesh, it was recorded that households utilizing chlorine treated water suffered from cholera 60% less than those who used untreated surface water.

Facilities for Improving Sanitation

Sewage Treatment Plants: These plants stop the toilets from contaminating water sources through feces.

Latrines: Open defecation is a principal risk factor, but proper latrines can mitigate the risk.

Wastewater Treatment: Control and treatment of wastewater minimizes the infection.

Promotion of Hygiene and Handwashing

Proper washing of hands with soap decreases the risk of diarrhea diseases by up to 40%.

Teaching children hygiene in school has been effective in reducing outbreaks in children.

In clinical areas, alcohol hand rubs can be used to control cross infection.

A Case Study Of The Effect Of Handwashing On The Infection Rate Of Rotavirus

A study conducted in childcare centers in Peru showed that the implementation of organized handwashing programs reduced the incidence of rotavirus infections by 30%.

Vaccination Programs

The Rotavirus Vaccine

It is the single most important method of preventing the associated ill health effects of severe diarrhea in children from 0 - 5 years.

The introduction of the vaccine Rotavirus and cholera vaccine with the aid from Gavi and WHO gives the program a 50 to 80% reduced hospitalization rates in the population.

The Cholera Vaccine

Oral cholera vaccines (OCVs) are important in area of outbreaks.

In Haiti and Yemen, mass vaccination météorée has led the country to administer school-based vaccination programs.

6. TREATMENT AND ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE CHALLENGES

Successful management of bowel infections relies on timely diagnosis, appropriate treatment, and good use of antimicrobials. While moderate cases may resolve with no active intervention, severe infections necessitate the use of antibiotics, antiparasitic agents, and vigorous fluid resuscitation. Unfortunately, emerging antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a major concern when treating bacterial bowel infections and more so in the intestinal ones.

In this section, the focus will be on the treatment patterns issue and its resistance to drugs with an assumption on how to deal with abdominal infection employing AMR challenges.

Supportive Treatment: Fluid and Electrolyte Replacement

Fluid replacement and electrolyte repletion is the cornerstone treatment in these patients. Treatment is primarily supportive and is aimed at replenishing the lost fluids and electrolytes.

ORT

ORT is a process of rehydration that typically involves rehydration solutions.

Glucose, sodium chloride, potassium, and sodium bicarbonate are used. They significantly enhance the absorption of water.

Since its discovery, ORS has decreased deaths from childhood diarrhea by 90%.

Case Study: ORT in Reducing Mortality in Bangladesh A massive study done in Bangladesh has proved the using of different forms of ORS caused cholera death rates to go from 30% to less than 1%.

IV Fluid Therapy

IV therapy is used for patients with moderate to severe dehydration due to cholera or dysentery.

Antibiotic and Antimicrobial Therapy

Although some intestinal infections do not need antibiotics, parasitic and bacterial infections inevitably do and have to be treated with specific and targeted antimicrobial agents.

Challenges of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

Antibiotic overuse presents the problem of Multidrug-Resistant Pathogens (MDR) and now the treatment is tougher than imagined.

Key Drug-Resistant Strains in Intestinal Infections

Producing Escherichia coli (E. coli) with extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL) is a common infection caused due to resistance from both penicillins and cephalosporins.

Fluoroquinolone resistant Shigella Typhi is also common in South east Asia.

Shigella multi-drug resistant (MDR) strains are common in Africa and south-east asia.

Case Study: XDR Typhoid in Pakistan: 2016 - Present

Salmonella Typhi is extensively drug resistant to the first line antibiotics for this infection except Azithromycin.

Alternative Therapies and Future Directions

Fecal Microbiota Transplantation (FMT)

Used to treat recurrent *C. difficile* infections in restoring balance to the preciously disturbed gut microbiome.

CTs in *C. diff* resistant patients show 90 percent success rate.

Bacteriophage Therapy

Phages have the ability to solely affect the non-auxiliary antibiotics resistant bacterium without damaging the gut microbiome aiding to intestine with antibiotics.

Probiotic and Microbiom based Treatments.

Certain probiotics having Lactobacilli put Superfamily C2, Union of Lactobacillaceae Classicoids been recently discovered.

7. POLICY ACTIONS AND FUTURE AIMS

International strategy towards managing intestinal infection focuses on prevention, access to care, managing antimicrobial resistance, and enhancing healthcare systems. Outbreak leader nations and regions require coordinated international action in outbreak control, burden of disease reduction, and impact amelioration of drug resistant pathogens.

This subsection examines major public health policies, global strategies, and pending actions on all forms of intestinal infections.

Barriers to Policy Action

Inequitable Access to Vaccines

- There is a vaccine supply gap with many low income countries.

Limited Health System Infrastructure

- There is no adequate sanitation and clean water and trained personnel in rural regions.

Poor Antibiotic Stewardship

- Unregulated antibiotic sales in weak policy countries worsen AMR.
- There is excessive use of fluoroquinolones and cephalosporins.

8. SUMMARY

There are still significant threats to global health holistically posed by intestinal infections, especially in the poorest regions. Although WASH, Vaccinations, and ORT have eased the disease burden significantly, there is still the challenge posed by antimicrobial resistance and inequitable access to healthcare.

In the future, concerted effort by all nations of the world is imperative for the following to be ensured:

Access to clean water, sanitation, and vaccines is broadened.

Improve real-time monitoring of diseases and readiness for outbreaks. By maintaining strong public health initiatives, we can further decrease deaths from diarrheal diseases, ultimately saving millions of lives annually.

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