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Mycobacterial Diseases

ISSN: 2161-1068

Commentary

An Overview on *Mycobacterium bovis* Infection

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DESCRIPTION

Mycobacterium bovis, commonly known as bovine tuberculosis, is an infectious disease that primarily affects cattle. However, it can also infect humans and a wide range of other animals, posing significant health risks to both livestock and people. This article delves into the nature of *Mycobacterium bovis* infection, its transmission, diagnostic methods, and the challenges associated with its control and prevention.

Overview of *Mycobacterium bovis*

Mycobacterium bovis is a slow-growing bacterium that belongs to the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex. It shares many similarities with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the causative agent of human tuberculosis. Both strains can cause similar clinical symptoms and are transmitted through respiratory droplets or ingestion of contaminated food or milk.

Transmission and epidemiology

The primary route of transmission for *Mycobacterium bovis* is inhalation of respiratory droplets expelled by infected animals. The bacterium can survive for extended periods in the environment, making indirect transmission through contaminated soil, feed, or water a possibility. Additionally, ingestion of unpasteurized milk or dairy products derived from infected animals can lead to human infection. *Mycobacterium bovis* infection has a global distribution but is more prevalent in regions with close contact between livestock and humans, such as rural areas or communities dependent on agriculture. Countries with a significant prevalence of bovine tuberculosis include parts of Africa, Asia, and South America. In developed nations, extensive control measures and rigorous testing have reduced the incidence of the disease in livestock and humans.

Clinical manifestations

In cattle, *Mycobacterium bovis* infection primarily affects the respiratory system, leading to chronic coughing, weight loss, and reduced milk production. Infected animals may also exhibit general weakness, enlarged lymph nodes, and even death in severe cases. When humans are infected, the disease is known as zoonotic tuberculosis. It can affect various organs, including the lungs, lymph nodes, bones, and skin. Clinical manifestations in humans can range from mild respiratory symptoms to severe systemic illness, depending on the extent of infection and the individual's immune status.

Diagnosis

Accurate diagnosis of *Mycobacterium bovis* infection is crucial for effective disease management. In cattle, diagnosis often involves tuberculin skin testing, which measures the animal's immune response to injected mycobacterial antigens. Positive reactions indicate exposure to the bacterium, warranting further testing and surveillance. In humans, the diagnosis of zoonotic tuberculosis is challenging due to its resemblance to human tuberculosis. It requires a combination of clinical evaluation, radiological imaging, tuberculin skin tests, and microbiological confirmation through sputum or tissue culture. Molecular techniques like Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) can also aid in the identification of *Mycobacterium bovis* DNA in clinical samples.

Control and prevention

Controlling and preventing *Mycobacterium bovis* infection presents several challenges due to its complex nature:

Interspecies transmission: The ability of *Mycobacterium bovis* to infect multiple species complicates control efforts. Eradicating the bacterium requires a coordinated one health approach involving veterinarians, public health officials, and agricultural authorities.

Wildlife reservoirs: Wild animals, particularly badgers, deer, and possums, can act as reservoirs for *Mycobacterium bovis* and transmit the infection to cattle and humans. This wildlife interface poses significant challenges for disease control, as culling or vaccination programs may be met with resistance from conservationists.

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Received: 01-May-2023, Manuscript No. MDTL-23-25118; **Editor assigned:** 03-May-2023, Pre QC No. MDTL-23-25118 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-May-2023, QC No. MDTL-23-25118; **Revised:** 24-May-2023, Manuscript No. MDTL-23-25118 (R); **Published:** 31-May-2023, DOI: 10.35248/2161-1068.23.13.356.

Citation: Nawaz S (2023) An Overview on *Mycobacterium bovis* Infection. Mycobact Dis. 13:356.