

Orsolya Kutasi¹, Sara Sardi², Kinga Joo¹, Eموke Ferenczi³, Monika Barna⁴, Akos Hornyak⁵, Andrea Harnos⁶, Otto Szenci¹, Tamas Bakonyi⁴

¹Large Animal Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Szent Istvan University, Dora major, Ullo, 225, Hungary

²Vet Agro Sup, Universite de Lyon, Cliniques Vétérinaires, Lyon, France

³National Center for Epidemiology, National Reference Laboratory for Viral Zoonoses, Gyalı ut 2-6, Budapest, 1097, Hungary

⁴Szent Istvan University, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Department of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Hungaria Krt. 23-25., Budapest, 1143, Hungary

⁵National Food Chain Safety Office, Veterinarv Diagnostic Directorate, Tabornok u. 2., 1143. Budapest, Hungary

Introduction

The West Nile virus (WNV) mainly infects birds, horses and humans. Outcomes of the infection range from light uncharacteristic symptoms to fatal neurologic disease. The Hungarian equine WNV outbreak reported in 2008 was the first caused by a lineage 2 sub-Saharan strain in Europe. To protect horses from serious disease an inactivated virus vaccine is available in Hungary since 2009.

Objectives

The main objectives of the present study were to measure serum IgG and IgM antibodies in naturally exposed and vaccinated horses, and to compare hemagglutination-inhibition test (HIT) results with those of competitive and IgM antibody capture (MAC) enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA).

Methods

Altogether 200 animals were tested with HIT for WNV antibodies and 35 horses were examined for both IgG and IgM with HIT and ELISA simultaneously. After primary screening for WNV antibodies, all horses were vaccinated. Samples were taken immediately before and 3-5 weeks after each vaccination.

GROUPS	HIT RESULTS IgG
1: naturally infected (positive)	38 (30,89%)
2: non-infected (negative)	85 (69,11%)
3: double primovaccination and seropositive 12 months later	57 (86,36%)
4: double primovaccination and seronegative 12 months later	9 (13,64%)
5: double primovaccination + yearly booster and seropositive 12 months later	11/11 (100%)
Horses included in the study	200

1. table: results of serosurvey with HIT in vaccinated and non-vaccinated horses

Statistical analysis

McNemar chi-squared and percent agreement tests were used to detect concordance between HIT and ELISA.

IgG HIT vs. ELISA McNemar's chi-squared = 4, df = 1, p-value = 0.0455

IgM HIT vs. ELISA McNemar's chi-squared = 6.5, df = 1, p-value = 0.01079

Group	IgM seropositivity after vaccination (booster or 1 st primovaccination)		IgM seropositivity after vaccination (2 nd primovaccination)	
	IgM Elisa	HIT IgM	IgM ELISA	HIT IgM
1	1/7	2/7	1/7	0/7
2	0/7	0/7	1/7	1/7
3	2/7	0/7		
4	4/7	1/7		
5	2/7	0/7		

2. table: IgM seropositivity after vaccination with ELISA and HIT.

Hypothesis is rejected, HIT and ELISAs are non-equivalent.

Results

Analyses by HIT confirmed the presence of WNV antibodies in 38/123 (30,89%) from naturally exposed horses. Sera from 57/66 (87,5%) vaccinated animals were positive before the first booster and from 11/11 (100%) before the second booster. HIT and ELISA tests were non-concordant with a low positive percentage agreement value concerning the IgM measurements. HIT was less sensitive when detecting IgG antibodies. We could detect post vaccination IgM in 11 cases with MAC ELISA and in 4 cases with HIT.

Discussion and conclusions

WNV is endemic in Hungary causing regular natural infections. Antibodies could not be detected in each individual case 12 months after primary injections, protection is more reliable after the first yearly booster. Based on our findings it may not be possible to differentiate infected horses from recently vaccinated horses using the MAC ELISA. HIT does not substitute ELISA when detecting IgM in acute infections.

References

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1. Image : vaccination with Duwaxyn WNV, photo:www.lovasok.hu