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Surveillance of patients with acute flaccid paralysis in Finland: report of a pilot study.

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Abstract: WHO recommends that surveillance of patients with acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) be used to demonstrate the eradication of wild poliovirus. In this article we report the results of a study to assess the frequency of AFP patients referred to Finnish hospitals and whether virological diagnostic coverage could be improved by repeated reminders and active feedback. For this purpose, we sent monthly questionnaires to all neurological and paediatric neurological units in Finland, requesting retrospective reporting on investigated paralytic patients with defined clinically relevant diagnoses, rather than AFP. Reminder letters included a pre-paid return envelope. Virological investigations were offered cost free. Of the 492 reporting forms sent, 415 (84%) were returned, evenly covering both the population and the study period (July 1997 to June 1998). Of the 90 patients reported, 83 were evaluable. The apparent incidences of the diagnoses covered were 1.6 per 100,000 at any age, and 1.0 per 100,000 for under--15-year-olds. Guillain-Barré syndrome was the most common diagnosis (0.80 per 100,000). The two faecal specimens required were virologically investigated in nine out of the 10 patients under 15 years of age, but in only 46% of all patients. Four adenovirus strains, but no polioviruses or other enteroviruses, were isolated. We conclude that a satisfactory monthly reporting system was readily established and that a sufficient number of patients with diagnoses resembling AFP are being referred to Finnish hospitals. Active feedback did not increase the proportion of virologically investigated patients to an acceptable level in all age groups. It is clear that other approaches must be used to quantify the circulation of poliovirus in Finland.

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