

Schistosomiasis in infants and pre-school-aged children in sub-Saharan Africa: implication for control

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SUMMARY

Until recently, the epidemiology and control of schistosomiasis in sub-Saharan Africa have focused primarily on infections in school-aged children and to a lesser extent on adults. Now there is growing evidence and reports of infection in infants and pre-school-aged children (<6 years old) in Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Uganda, with reported prevalence from 14% to 86%. In this review, we provide available information on the epidemiology, transmission and control of schistosomiasis in this age group, generally not considered or included in national schistosomiasis control programmes that are being implemented in several sub-Saharan African countries. Contrary to previous assumptions, we show that schistosomiasis infection starts from early childhood in many endemic communities and factors associated with exposure of infants and pre-school-aged children to infection are yet to be determined. The development of morbidity early in childhood may contribute to long-term clinical impact and severity of schistosomiasis before they receive treatment. Consistently, these issues are overlooked in most schistosomiasis control programmes. It is, therefore, necessary to review current policy of schistosomiasis control programmes in sub-Saharan Africa to consider the treatment of infant and pre-school-aged children and the health education to mothers.

Key words: schistosomiasis, pre-school-aged children, sub-Saharan Africa, epidemiology, transmission, control.