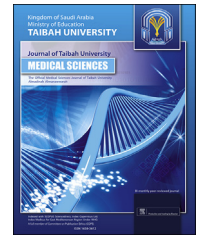




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Original Article

General public knowledge and practices about the common cold



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المخلص

أهداف البحث: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم المعرفة والممارسة لأفراد المجتمع تجاه نزلات البرد في الطائف، المملكة العربية السعودية.

طرق البحث: تم تطوير وتوزيع استبانة على 1700 مشارك باستخدام طريقة التوزيع الملائمة غير الاحتمالية. وتم تعبئة 1487 استبانة صالحة للاستخدام. ثم جمعت البيانات وحللت باستخدام برنامج الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية.

النتائج: أظهر غالبية المشاركين في الاستطلاع قلة المعرفة حول نزلات البرد ويعتقد 40% منهم أنه لا يوجد فرق بين نزلات البرد والانفلونزا، كما يعتقد 66% من المشاركين أن المضادات الحيوية تعالج نزلات البرد. يعتقد 24% من المشاركين أن السعال والاتصال المباشر مع المصابين يسهم في نشر المرض. ويتخذ جزء بسيط جداً من المشاركين الإجراءات الاحتياطية لمنع انتشار المرض عند الإصابة أو عند مقابلة أشخاص مصابين بنزلة البرد.

الاستنتاجات: دلت النتائج أن أفراد المجتمع بالطائف يفتقرون إلى المعلومات الصحيحة تجاه نزلات البرد، وطرق التعامل معها، ويمكن ملاحظة ذلك من خلال ممارساتهم الخاطئة تجاه التعامل مع نزلات البرد. وينبغي لوضعي سياسة الرعاية الصحية النظر في هذه النتائج بعين الاعتبار لوضع خطط لتحسين المعرفة العامة والممارسة الصحيحة لأفراد المجتمع تجاه نزلات البرد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعرفة العامة؛ الممارسة العامة؛ نزلات البرد؛ المضادات الحيوية؛ سياسة الرعاية الصحية

Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to evaluate the knowledge and practices of the general public about the common cold in Taif, KSA.

Methods: A pre-validated questionnaire was developed and administered to 1700 respondents using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. A total of 1487 completed and valid questionnaires were successfully obtained. All data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 22.0 at an alpha value of 0.05.

Results: The majority of respondents demonstrated poor knowledge about the common cold. Forty percent of respondents believed that there was no difference between the common cold and the flu. Sixty-six percent of participants believed that antibiotics would cure the common cold. Only 24% believed that coughing and direct contact with patients suffering from the common cold would spread this illness. A small number of participants, after catching the common cold, took precautionary measures such as avoiding contact with other people.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that the general public has poor knowledge about the common cold, which is reflected in their routine practices towards illness management. Healthcare policy makers should consider these findings in developing plans for improving public knowledge and practices.

Keywords: Antibiotics; Common cold; Healthcare policy; Public knowledge; Public practices

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Introduction

The common cold is mostly a self-limited illness confined to the upper respiratory tract.^{1,2} This mild upper respiratory tract infection is usually caused by several viruses that belong to different families.^{3–5} The most common viruses are rhinoviruses. The most common symptoms of the common cold are sore throat, acute cough,^{6,7} sneezing, nasal stuffiness and discharge, and nasal congestion.⁸

The incubation period of the common cold ranges from 24 to 72 h, whereas the average duration of illness is one week. The common cold can easily be transmitted through inhaling infected droplets hanging in the air and released when an infected patient coughs or sneezes. Transmission can also occur through direct contact with an infected person.^{1,9}

The common cold causes a great economic burden to society in different ways, such as through the costs incurred due to frequent visits to healthcare providers and the costs of medications and medical supplements.⁸ In addition, absence from work and school contributes greatly to the economic burden on society. Even if patients are not absent from work due to the common cold, the quality and efficiency of their output will be affected.

A lack of knowledge and malpractice towards the diagnosis and management of the common cold increases the economic burden and reduces patients' quality of life.⁸

Many studies have shown that patients usually self-treat their illness with over-the-counter (OTC) or prescribed medicines.^{10–12} Patients' lack of knowledge about the aetiology of the illness leads either to using the wrong medications or pressuring medical professionals to prescribe them unnecessary medications.¹³ This can be easily seen in the use of antibiotics for common cold treatment, which indicates that the majority of patients believe that the common cold is caused by bacteria.¹³ Another major segment of society believes that antibiotics are effective against both viruses and bacteria.¹² This leads to economic wastage by using unnecessary medications in addition to an increased risk of developing antibacterial resistance.

The relatively cool year-round climate of the city of Taif and its proximity to the city of Makkah make it attractive to visitors and thus a natural place for a frequent and large number of patients infected with the common cold. Therefore, this study was designed to measure the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the general public in Taif regarding the common cold. The results of this study will be helpful for decision makers in the Saudi Ministry of Health to design programs and make interventions to minimize the inappropriate management and irrational use of medicines among the general public in Taif for the treatment of the common cold.

Materials and Methods

Study design

A cross-sectional research design using a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used in this study.

Data collection tool: the questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed after a comprehensive literature search in well-known databases. A first draft was developed and validated by an expert team of researchers from the clinical pharmacy department of Taif University. The final draft of the questionnaire was then translated into Arabic and verified by the same researchers. The final draft of the Arabic version was piloted on 15 respondents to solicit their feedback on the questionnaire draft. The respondents raised some comments and suggestions that were considered in creating the final draft of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part included the respondents' demographics, such as age, gender, and educational level. The second part included the respondents' general knowledge about the common cold, such as causes of the common cold, its management and methods of transmitting the common cold. The third section addressed the respondents' practices for managing the common cold. The questions addressed the steps that patients usually take to manage the common cold, the steps patients take if symptoms of the common cold continue for more than seven days, and how respondents respond upon interacting with those suffering from the common cold. Answers were designed to be either Yes/No or multiple choice. It is believed that close-ended questions are much easier for respondents to answer and lead to a higher response rate.

Data collection procedure

Researchers met with respondents in public areas in the city of Taif. They started by introducing themselves to the respondents and then informed them that no findings that could be used to identify them would be published and that all information would be kept confidential. Researchers gave the questionnaire to those who agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire took no more than 10 min to complete.

Inclusion criteria

Members of the general public above the age of 16 and able to read and write in Arabic were included in this study.

Exclusion criteria

Any respondent who was under the age of 16, who was unable to read and write in Arabic, or who refused to participate in this study was excluded from this study.

Data collection areas

Data were collected from the general public in public areas such as shopping malls, restaurants and health centres.

Data analysis

Descriptive analyses such as frequencies, percentages and graphs were used to describe the findings of this study, whereas the Chi square test was used to compare the results with different demographic variables of the respondents such as age, marital status and education. A 95% significance level was used in data analysis, and any alpha value of less than 0.05% was considered significant. Data obtained from this

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