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Epidemiology of Imported Infectious Diseases, China, 2005–2016

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The authors analyzed the epidemiologic characteristics of imported infectious diseases in China using a national reporting system. They use this analysis to make recommendations for improving prevention and monitoring protocols.

Abstract: The abstract accurately summarizes the article

Introduction: Overall, the authors lay out a clear background to their specific research question. While there is plenty of research on specific infectious diseases in China, the authors do address the gap/need for a large epidemiologic study that describes trends in imported infectious diseases.

Methods: The authors use a retrospective analysis and gathered their data from a national reporting system and used statistical analysis tools. This is a sound and straightforward method. The only major issue is with the population/case definitions used (see comments below).

Results: The results are incredibly thorough, but dense. This section could be simplified.

Conclusions: Again, the need for this research and gaps that it fills are clearly stressed. The implications for public health are apparent and the recommendations for further action provided by the authors are justified, however, it lacks a greater global context (see comments below).

It is recommended that this article be accepted for publication on the condition that revisions are made.

Major Comments

- It seems as if there should be greater distinction in “imported” cases. As per the definition given, citizens of China can fall into either the “indigenous” or “imported” categories, which leaves a lot of ambiguity in interpretation of results and implications to a certain extent. It is recommended that the authors reexamine their data classifications and break up their “imported” category into two separate categories along the lines of “returning citizens of China” and “foreign visitors (tourists, migrant workers, etc.)”, thus providing greater clarity throughout the rest of the article, especially to the importance of this article to global epidemiologic research.
- This study lacks external validity. This study addresses the global transit of infectious diseases but makes no mention of other areas in the world where this may be an issue or what has been done in other parts of the world to mitigate concerns about imported infectious diseases. This is also evident in the sources, as there are only a few sources outside of China. It is recommended that the authors do some more background research in this area and frame the introduction and discussion in more of a global context, making it more applicable to readers outside of China.
- There is a wealth of information in this study, however it may be too much. The authors attempt to analyze this large data base and try to cover a lot of information in a limited space. It is recommended that the authors frame this paper in a broader context and leave the more detailed results and analysis for subsequent papers. For example, the information on malaria could be a separate paper.

Minor Comments

- The introduction focuses heavily on malaria despite the focus on infectious diseases as a whole. It is recommended that the authors keep a general scope in the introduction and save the discussion/specifics on malaria for the results or discussion.
- Figure 1 may not be entirely necessary or relevant to the issue at hand.
- Figure 2 may be more useful if each disease was separated out into individual diseases
- Tables 1, 2, and 3 are very busy. Condensing or restructuring the figures could help readers identify key information.