

Study estimates health care costs of gastrointestinal illnesses in Switzerland

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In Switzerland, between 300,000 and 700,000 patients per year visit a doctor due to acute diarrhoea. Until now, the financial burden on the Swiss health care system had been completely unclear. The study, recently published in the scientific journal *Epidemiology & Infection*, estimates the costs entailed until a patient is cured.

In 2012, gastrointestinal diseases gave rise to health care costs of between EUR 29 to 45 million. This includes costs for visiting a doctor, hospitalisation, laboratory-based diagnostic tests and medicines. The study estimates individual costs for illnesses caused by acute diarrhoea ranging from about EUR 30 to 4,800 depending on the severity of the illness.

"These cost estimates are very conservative. The economic costs, such as absences from work, as well as other indirect costs have not been taken into account yet," highlights Dr Daniel Mäusezahl, epidemiologist at the Swiss TPH.

"The total cost of diarrhoea as a common illness may be considerably higher. It is astonishing that so little is done in terms of prevention regarding this common disease. There are more consultations due to diarrhoea than due to flu during the annual influenza season," adds Claudia Schmutz, PhD student and lead author of the paper.

Campylobacter infections - with serious financial implications

Infections with the pathogen *Campylobacter* generate costs of estimated EUR 8 million annually. This is the most commonly reported cause of foodborne disease in Switzerland. Usually, *Campylobacter* infections are mild. However, in some cases, they can lead to hospitalisation with high treatment costs. In Switzerland, up to 8,500 people are diagnosed with a *Campylobacter* infection each year.

The new study follows on an earlier *Campylobacter* outbreak investigation in Switzerland. The latter demonstrated an increased risk of *Campylobacter* infection following consumption of chicken in the form of meat fondue ("Fondue Chinoise"). An increased risk for infection is generally also seen during the barbecue season.

Preventive measures

The authors of the study point out that the exceedingly high number of cases of campylobacteriosis could be reduced through the implementation of hygiene measures on the part of meat producers, but also on the part of consumers. The cause of most other gastrointestinal illnesses is unknown.

Source:

Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute
