Reviewer's report

Title: Surveillance of Febrile Patients in a District and Evaluation of Their Spatiotemporal Associations: a Pilot Study

Version: 1 Date: 21 August 2009

Reviewer: Eric Lau

Reviewer's report:

Major Essential Revisions

1. In the abstract; results: the range of the time span for the clusters is 2-8 days. However, the definition of a cluster is “three or more spatially associated febrile patients within three consecutive days.” Why the lower bound of the range can be less than 3 days?

2. In the methods section, please clarify whether the date of fever is left-censored by the ED attendance / admission date.

3. While it is difficult to define an optimal time frame for the definition of a cluster in this pilot study, the interpretation of the results significantly depends on the duration from infection to the onset/presence of fever. The variation of this duration among non-specific diseases, in additional to the type of available information on fever (onset versus on presentation) may further affect the results. As a pilot study, sensitivity analyses on the cluster definitions will be very informative for further development.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. page 6 last line: “… and they last for 3 days”. It should be the median.
2. Table 1C: The column names should be “Cluster” and “Non-cluster”.

Discretionary Revisions

This pilot study will be more informative on the usefulness of the surveillance method on outbreak detection, if some exploratory analysis on the relation between febrile clusters and disease are presented. (e.g. make use of the provisional diagnosis)

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.