Reviewer's report

Title: A typhoid fever outbreak in a slum of South Dumdum municipality, West Bengal, India, 2007: Evidence for foodborne and waterborne transmission

Version: 3 Date: 6 November 2008

Reviewer: Albert M Vollaard

Reviewer's report:

After thorough rewriting and refining source and case definition, the article has improved in contents and readability. My compliments. The main assumption was that an index case started a small epidemic (point source outbreak) followed by a continuous elevated transmission (multiple source outbreak) due to inadequate waste water disposal. For more than 50% these assumptions prove right.

At least more diagnostic information about the index case is provided, increasing the power of assumption.

Also more information about the 4 cases is given that were subjected to blood culture. 1 of them was culture positive. Could you provide us with the Widal titers to increase the assumption that we are dealing with typhoid fever cases (since the description on clinical symptoms: headache, malaise and anorexia is non-specific).

Good to see that a weighted calculation was done of the risk factors in stratified unmatched analysis to verify any independent contribution to disease.

Little information is provided about the local background incidence of other food/waterborne diseases (that might decrease concurrently after the chlorination of piped water) or other febrile diseases (e.g. dengue, chikungunya, leptospirosis) that are not faeco-orally transmitted and consequently would not be influenced by the public health measures implemented by the research group. The decrease after the chlorination increases the suspicion that the latter group of diseases might not be likely causes of febrile disease. I think the authors could emphasize this point to strengthen the power of association, unless climatic factors (rain, flooding, water shortage) influence the rate of water contamination or use of piped water.

I think the authors have defended their findings adequately and increased the strength of assumption.

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