Reviewer's report

Title: Published data underestimates the burden of hepatitis A intervention triggered by infected food-handlers

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2006

Reviewer: R Jake Jacobs

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and well written report, which provides a useful compilation of data from diverse sources. The research question is clear, the methods are adequate and well described, and the conclusions are reasonably drawn from study results.

Using the categorization of comments suggested by the editor, each of the following points should be considered as proposed “discretionary revisions.”

1) Page 2, paragraph 2 - It may was not immediately clear to me what the acronym PEP indicated. I later surmised it mean post-exposure prophylaxis. This should probably be spelled when the acronym is first used.

2) Page 2, paragraph 3 - It may be useful to discuss the proportion of HAV cases that are actually captured through surveillance systems. Data from the US (Armstrong and Bell, Pediatrics, 2002) suggest only a minority of HAV cases are reported.

3) Page 2, paragraph 4 - should MEDLINE now be called PubMed?

4) Page 2, paragraph 4 - I presume the start dates of 1966 for MEDLINE and 1980 for EMBASE reflect the first availability of data. If so, please state.

5) Page 3, first full paragraph - Methods, second paragraph - Was there really disagreement between reviewers about whether a food worker was infected? How often did disagreements occur? What were the nature of the disagreements? Please give an example or two. If resolution in any way affected study results, this should be addressed in the Discussion.

6) Page 3, second full paragraph - Why are references 12 & 13 cited here? Are these simply examples of studies using similar (dual reviewer) methods?

7) Page 3, second full paragraph - While it more fully described on page 5, please indicate in the Methods section which specific actions are required to classify an intervention as “limited” versus “large.”

8) Page 4, first paragraph - The term “not infrequent” seems to imply a judgement or conclusion, and may be moved to the discussion section.

9) Page 4, first paragraph - You should probably indicate that “reported” secondary cases occurred in 12/16 events. There could have been unidentified cases.

10) Page 7, second full paragraph - Please note that reference 31 only considers food workers who resided in states with elevated HAV rates before routine childhood vaccination was implemented.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

Capitol Outcomes Research, Inc., in which I am a shareholder, has received research funding from GlaxoSmithKline. I am aware of no other competing interests.