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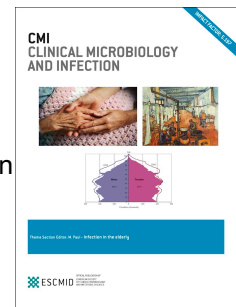
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Pregnancy outcomes and cytomegalovirus DNAemia in HIV-infected pregnant women with CMV.

Marco Floridia¹, Maria F. Pirillo¹, Anna Degli Antoni², Atim Molinari², Enrica Tamburrini³, Carmela Pinnetti⁴, Giovanni Guaraldi⁵, Giulia Nardini⁵, Giulia Masuelli⁶, Serena Dalzero⁷, Irene Cetin⁸, Matilde Sansone⁹, Roberta Amici¹ and Marina Ravizza⁷, on behalf of *The Italian Group on Surveillance on Antiretroviral Treatment in Pregnancy.*

¹ Department of Therapeutic Research and Medicines Evaluation, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy.

² Department of Infectious Diseases and Hepatology, Azienda Ospedaliera di Parma, Italy.

³ Department of Infectious Diseases, Catholic University, Rome, Italy.

⁴ I.N.M.I. Lazzaro Spallanzani, Rome, Italy.

⁵ Department of Medical Specialties, Infectious Diseases Clinic, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Modena, Italy.

⁶ Department of Obstetrics and Neonatology, Città della Salute e della Scienza Hospital, and University of Turin, Italy.

⁷ Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, DMSD San Paolo Hospital Medical School, University of Milan, Italy.

⁸ Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Luigi Sacco Hospital and University of Milan, Italy.

⁹ Department of Neurosciences, Reproductive and Dentistry Science, University Federico II, Naples, Italy.

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Correspondence to: **Marco Floridia, Department of Therapeutic Research and Medicines Evaluation, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Viale Regina Elena 299, 00161 Rome, Italy. Tel: +39 06 4990 3228; Fax: +39 06 4938 7199; e-mail: marco.floridia@iss.it**

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Sir, it is well known that cytomegalovirus (CMV) coinfection affects a large proportion of people

with HIV, with a significant impact on disease progression and survival [1]. In HIV-CMV coinfecting pregnant women, however, few studies have been conducted: maternal immunosuppression has been linked to a higher risk of CMV infant infection, and CMV DNAemia to higher maternal and infant mortality [2-3].

Overall, little is known about pregnancy outcomes and CMV viremia in CMV-coinfecting pregnant women with HIV. In order to further explore this issue, we evaluated the impact of CMV coinfection on pregnancy outcomes in a national cohort of pregnant women with HIV, assessing in a study subsample the prevalence and correlates of CMV DNAemia in HIV-CMV coinfecting pregnant women.

Data from the Italian National Program on Surveillance on Antiretroviral Treatment in Pregnancy were used [4], considering all HIV-infected women with known CMV serostatus. We compared the main pregnancy outcomes between women with and without positive serology for CMV, and evaluated plasma CMV-DNA levels in a subset of CMV-positive women who had given specific consent to virologic evaluations and had evaluable plasma samples. The cases were analyzed retrospectively, and no systematic screening for CMV infection was conducted in infants. Ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the I.N.M.I. Lazzaro Spallanzani in Rome; ref. deliberations: 578/2001 (September 28, 2001) and 7/2003 (February 26, 2003). Plasma CMV-DNA was quantified with the kPCR PLX® Cytomegalovirus DNA assay (Siemens Healthcare) using the VERSANT™ kPCR Molecular System (Siemens), with a detection limit of 214.6 (2.33 log) IU/ml. Quantitative data were compared by the Mann-Whitney U test and proportions by the chi-square test, with odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) calculated. P values below 0.05 were considered significant, using for all analyses the SPSS software, version 22.0 (IBM Corp, Released 2013, Armonk, NY, USA).

As of March 21, 2016, among 2250 pregnancies with available information on CMV serostatus (62% of all cases in the database, including ongoing pregnancies and cases lost to follow up), 1490 were CMV antibody-positive (66.2%). Women with and without positive serology for CMV were similar for age, CD4 counts, CDC-HIV disease stage, parity, antiretroviral treatment experience and treatment status at conception. No differences between the two groups were also found for the main pregnancy outcomes, represented by miscarriage or fetal demise, preterm delivery, low (<2500g) or very low (<1500g) birthweight, intrauterine growth restriction (gender-and gestational age-adjusted Z-score for birthweight <10th percentile), major birth defects, delivery complications, and HIV transmission (Table 1). Among 1126 infants from CMV-positive mothers with available information on clinical status, three neonatal cases of CMV infection were reported.

Among the 1490 women positive for CMV antibodies, 123 (8.3%) had available plasma samples collected during pregnancy, usually (90.2%) after the first trimester, that were evaluated for CMV-DNA quantitation.

None of these women had clinical signs of new viral infection or viral reactivation during pregnancy. Only four of them (3.3%) had positive CMV DNAemia in plasma, all at very low levels (range: 2.35-2.61 log IU/ml). None of these four women had low ($<200/\text{mm}^3$) CD4 counts (range: 270-852), and all had normal pregnancy outcomes, with no preterm delivery, low birthweight, birth defects, CMV or HIV transmission reported. Interestingly, all the four mothers had detectable HIV in plasma at third trimester (range: 99-20004 copies/ml).

This study showed that in a large cohort of pregnant women with HIV, roughly two thirds had positive serology for CMV, with no adverse consequences of coinfection on the main pregnancy outcomes. This rate is almost identical to that observed in two different studies conducted among a general population of pregnant women in Northern and Southern Italy, that showed prevalences of positive CMV serology of 68.3% (1925/2817) and 65.9% (595/797), respectively [5,6], suggesting similar CMV prevalence for HIV-negative and HIV-positive pregnant women. We also showed in a nested evaluation that among pregnant women with HIV with positive serology for CMV and no signs of primary infection, a small proportion (4/123, 3.3%) have detectable CMV DNAemia, usually at low levels. This figure is consistent with published data in an HIV-CMV coinfecting African population, where rate of detectable CMV in plasma was 4.8% (7/146) [7], suggesting slightly higher rate of CMV DNAemia among pregnant women with HIV compared to the general population. In a previous Italian study on a general population of CMV IgG-positive pregnant women with no evidence of primary infection, 0.5% (4/774) had positive, low-level CMV DNAemia [8]. A similar rate (2/134, 1.4%) was found in an unselected population of Turkish pregnant women [9]. Detectable low-level CMV DNAemia could represent either subclinical viral reactivation or the terminal phase of blood viral clearance after a recent primary infection. It is unknown whether partial immunosuppression in pregnant women with HIV may be responsible for low-level CMV replication and detectable DNAemia, and we were unable to define timing of CMV infection by antibody avidity testing or evaluation of CMV-specific IgM. In any case, asymptomatic maternal CMV DNAemia in a context of relatively preserved CD4 counts seems to represent for pregnant women with HIV an infrequent condition not associated with major clinical consequences.

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95 **The Italian Group on Surveillance of Antiretroviral Treatment in Pregnancy:**

96 *Project coordinators:* M. Florida, M. Ravizza, E. Tamburrini.

97 *Participants:* M. Ravizza, E. Tamburrini, F. Mori, P. Ortolani, E.R. dalle Nogare, F. Di Lorenzo, G. Sterrantino, M. Meli, S.
 98 Polemi, J. Nocentini, M. Baldini, G. Montorzi, M. Mazzetti, P. Rogasi, B. Borch, F. Vichi, B. Del Pin, E. Pinter, E.
 99 Anzalone, R. Marocco, C. Mastroianni, V.S. Mercurio, A. Carocci, E. Grilli, A. Maccabruni, M. Zaramella, B. Mariani, G.
 100 Natalini Raponi, G. Guaraldi, G. Nardini, C. Stentarelli, B. Beghetto, A.M. Degli Antoni, A. Molinari, M.P. Crisalli, A.
 101 Donisi, M. Piepoli, V. Cerri, G. Zuccotti, V. Giacometti, S. Coletto, F. Di Nello, C. Madia, G. Placido, A. Vivarelli, P. Castelli,
 102 F. Savalli, V. Portelli, F. Sabbatini, D. Francisci, L. Bernini, P. Grossi, L. Rizzi, S. Alberico, G. Maso, M. Airoud, G.
 103 Soppelsa, A. Meloni, M. Dedoni, C. Cuboni, F. Ortu, P. Piano, A. Citernes, I. Bordoni Vicini, K. Luzi, A. Spinillo, M.
 104 Roccio, A. Vimercati, A. Miccolis, A. De Gennaro, B. Guerra, F. Cervi, G. Simonazzi, E. Margarito, M.G. Capretti, C.
 105 Marsico, G. Faldella, M. Sansone, P. Martinelli, A. Agangi, A. Capone, G.M. Maruotti, C. Tibaldi, L. Trentini, T. Todros,
 106 G. Masuelli, V. Frisina, I. Cetin, T. Brambilla, V. Savasi, C. Personeni, C. Giaquinto, M. Fiscon, E. Rubino, A. Bucceri, R.
 107 Matrone, G. Scaravelli, O. Genovese, C. Cafforio, C. Pinnetti, G. Liuzzi, V. Tozzi, P. Massetti, A.M. Casadei, A.F.
 108 Cavaliere, M. Cellini, G. Castelli Gattinara, A.M. Marconi, S. Dalzero, V. Sacchi, M. Ierardi, C. Polizzi, A. Mattei, M.F.
 109 Pirillo, R. Amici, C.M. Galluzzo, S. Donnini, S. Baroncelli, M. Florida.

110 *Pharmacokinetics:* P. Villani, M. Cusato.

111 *Advisory Board:* A. Cerioli, M. De Martino, P. Mastroiacovo, F. Parazzini, E. Tamburrini, S. Vella.

112 *SIGO-HIV Group National Coordinators:* P. Martinelli, M. Ravizza.

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116 **Conflicts of interest:**

117 None to declare. None of the authors has a commercial or other association, financial interest, activity,
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125 **Contribution to authorship**

126 MF designed the study, drafted and finalised the manuscript and was responsible for statistical analysis;
 127 MFP and RA performed virological analyses on plasma samples and contributed to manuscript finalisation;
 128 AdA, AM, ET, CP, GG, GN, GM, SD, IC, MS and MR substantially contributed to clinical activities, acquisition
 129 of data and to critical revision of the manuscript. All the authors gave approval to the final version to be
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Table 1. Characteristics and pregnancy outcomes according to CMV serostatus.

<i>Women's characteristics</i>	CMV-positive		CMV-negative		CMV-positive	CMV-negative	<i>P</i> value ^a
	N		Median values (IQR)				
Age, years (n: 2245)	1486		759		33 (29-36)	33 (28-37)	0.924
CD4 cell count, cells/mm ³ (n: 1453) ^b	998		455		437 (297-591)	425 (289-612)	0.978
	n/N	%	n/N	%			
At least one previous pregnancy (n: 2218)	1090/1467	74.3	551/751	73.4			0.636
History of AIDS-defining events (n: 2220)	84/1470	5.7	45/750	6.0			0.785
Antiretroviral-treatment experienced (n: 2185)	929/1447	64.2	504/738	68.3			0.057
On treatment at conception (n: 2225)	777/1475	52.7	390/750	52.0			0.762
<i>Pregnancy outcomes</i>					OR ^c	OR 95% CI	
Miscarriage or fetal demise (n: 1941)	95/1313	7.2	56/628	8.9	0.797	0.564-1.125	0.196
Preterm delivery (n: 1672)	234/1152	20.3	108/520	20.8	0.972	0.753-1.256	0.830
Low birthweight (<2500 g) (n: 1576, twins included)	250/1082	23.1	101/494	20.4	1.169	0.901-1.517	0.239
Very low birthweight (<1500 g) (n: 1576, twins included)	37/1082	3.4	11/494	2.2	1.555	0.786-3.074	0.205
Small by gestational age (<10 th percentile) (n: 1516, singletons only)	130/1034	12.6	53/482	11.0	1.164	0.829-1.634	0.381
Complications of delivery ^d (n: 1606)	85/1100	7.7	37/506	7.3	1.062	0.711-1.586	0.771
Major birth defects (n: 1616)	39/1108	3.5	17/508	3.3	1.054	0.590-1.881	0.860
HIV transmission (n: 1235)	14/857	1.6	8/370	2.1	0.768	0.319-1.847	0.556

OR = odds ratio; CI = Confidence interval; IQR = interquartile range; ARV = antiretroviral therapy.

^a Mann-Whitney *U* test for quantitative variables and Chi-square test for categorical variables. ^b 2nd trimester. ^c Reference category: CMV-positive. ^d Usually represented by surgical wound infections and fever.