

N Engl J Med. 2008 Aug 7;359(6):593-602

HHV-6A in Syncytial Giant-Cell Hepatitis.

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Syncytial giant-cell hepatitis is a rare but severe form of hepatitis that is associated with autoimmune diseases, drug reactions, and viral infections. We used serologic, molecular, and immunohistochemical methods to search for an infectious cause in a case of syncytial giant-cell hepatitis that developed in a liver-transplant recipient who had latent infection with variant B of human herpesvirus 6 (HHV-6B) and who had received the organ from a donor with variant A latent infection (HHV-6A). At the onset of the disease, the detection of HHV-6A (but not HHV-6B) DNA in plasma, in affected liver tissue, and in single micromanipulated syncytial giant cells with the use of two different polymerase-chain-reaction (PCR) assays indicated the presence of active HHV-6A infection in the patient. Expression of the HHV-6A-specific early protein, p41/38, but not of the HHV-6B-specific late protein, p101, was demonstrated only in liver syncytial giant cells in the absence of other infectious pathogens. The same markers of HHV-6A active infection were documented in serial follow-up samples from the patient and disappeared only at the resolution of syncytial giant-cell hepatitis. Neither HHV-6B DNA nor late protein was identified in the same follow-up samples from the patient. Thus, HHV-6A may be a cause of syncytial giant-cell hepatitis. 2008 Massachusetts Medical Society

PMID: 18687640 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]