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Letter to Editor



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Incidence of acute infectious conjunctivitis across the pre- and post-COVID era: a 7-year-result from a tertiary acute hospital in Hong Kong

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Acute infectious conjunctivitis (AIC) is one of the most common communicable diseases encountered in acute hospital settings. Transmission exists long before COVID-19. Research showed COVID-19 infections were associated with AIC, as the most common ocular manifestations[1]. Thus, an increase in AIC during COVID-19 is expected[2]. However, personal hygiene practices and public health measures throughout COVID-19 negatively impacted the incidence of influenza and other upper respiratory tract infections, as for AIC[3]. Our retrospective study extracted the data between July 2016 to June 2023, from the hospital communicable ocular diseases database. We aim to reveal the incidence of AIC across the pre- and post-COVID era in a local regional acute hospital.

A total of 1512 patients with AIC were identified in the last 7 years across the pre- and post-COVID era. Monthly incidences of AIC over the past 7 years were plotted as a line chart (Figure 1A). There was no obvious fluctuation throughout the years. February, when winter turns to spring in Hong Kong, got the lowest number of AIC throughout the year. In contrast, the middle of schools' summer vacation in August, got the highest rate of AIC. September, when the school academic year started, was not associated with a surge of AIC.


The annual incidence of AIC is plotted in Figure 1B. The mean number of AIC per year was 216±97. However, there was

a significant ($P<0.001$) drop in AIC cases across 2020, when COVID-19 local outbreak happened in Hong Kong[4]. Social distancing and face masks wearing were lifted by the end of 2022, but there was no rebound of AIC cases observed after.

Despite our study's limitations lie on the decreased out-patient clinics' attendance under COVID-19[5], and lack of microbiology diagnosis, we believe hand hygiene, alcohol hand rub, and avoidance of hand-to-eye contact practices inherited from COVID-19 pandemic have prevented many contagious AIC transmissions within our locality.

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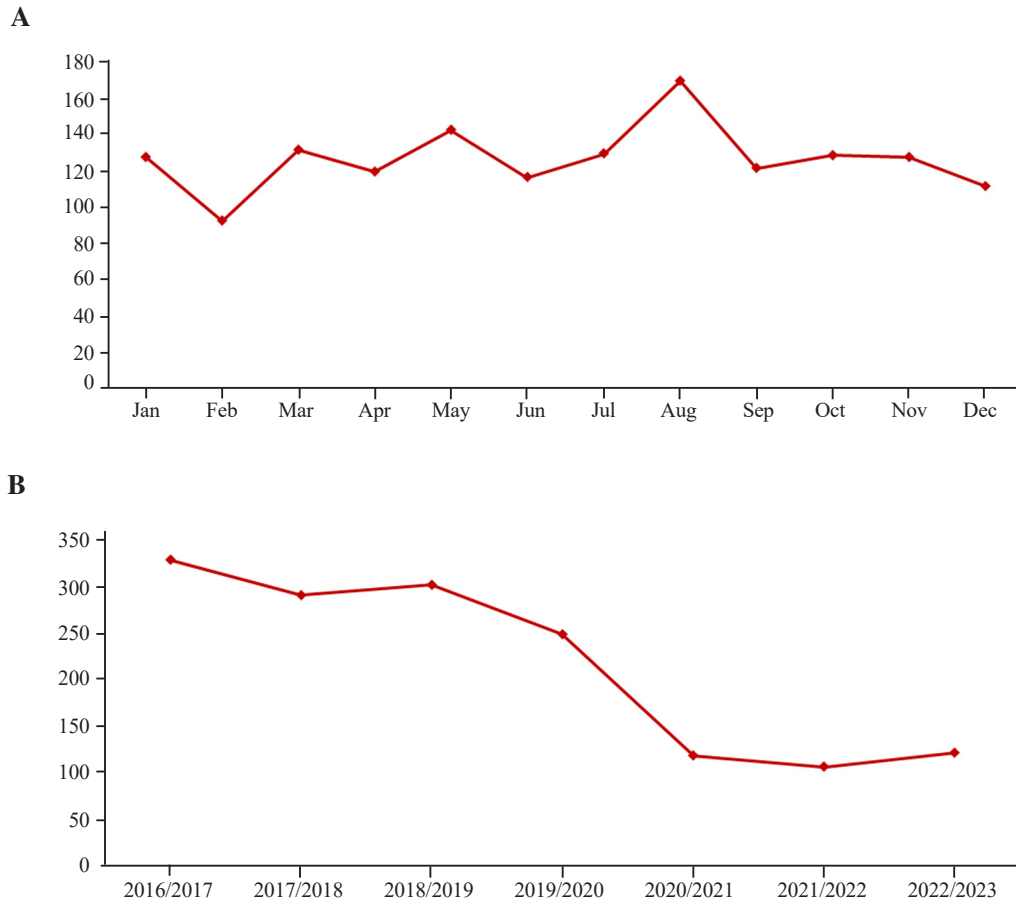


Figure 1. Monthly incidence (A) and annual incidence (B) of acute infectious conjunctivitis across the past 7 years in a local regional acute hospital in Hong Kong.

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