

# Importance of antimicrobial factors for microbiocenosis and local immunity of the oral cavity in children with mucoviscidosis

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The involvement of commensals and opportunistic pathogens and the role of protective mechanisms in the development of dental diseases in children with cystic fibrosis require more detailed study.

**The aim** of the study was to determine the ecological characteristics of the oral microbiota and some antimicrobial factors of saliva in children with mucoviscidosis.

**Materials and methods.** The study involved an assessment of oral microbiota as complex ecological system that protects the human body from colonization by pathogenic flora in children with cystic fibrosis. Bacteriological studies have been performed on clinical material from 30 children with mucoviscidosis diagnosed with dental and periodontal diseases.

**Results.** In the microbiological study of plaque microbiota, 70 strains of opportunistic pathogens were isolated in patients with mucoviscidosis. The most significant were alpha-hemolytic Streptococci (40%). The proportion of bacteria of Neisseria genus in patients with cystic fibrosis was lower and amounted to 24.3%. C. albicans fungi were isolated in comparable values (18.5%), S. aureus (8.5%), as well as gram-negative strains of E. aerogenes (4.3%) and E. coli (4.3%) significantly dominated. The results indicate that opportunistic pathogens S. aureus, E. aerogenes and E. coli partially replaced the representatives of the normal oral microbiota alpha-hemolytic streptococci and non-pathogenic species of Neisseria genus in patients with mucoviscidosis.

**Conclusions.** Microbiota of plaque in children with mucoviscidosis is characterized by an expansion of the spectrum of opportunistic pathogens due to Staphylococcus aureus, enterobacteria and C. albicans fungi, which indicates a violation of the microbiocenosis due to reduced mucosal immunity. Mucosal immunity of the oral cavity in children with mucoviscidosis is characterized by a 1.5-fold decrease in lysozyme activity and the level of secretory IgA in the saliva of children.

**Key words:** children, microbiocenosis, local immunity, oral cavity, mucoviscidosis

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## Znaczenie czynników przeciwdrobnoustrojowych dla mikrobiocenozy i odporności miejscowej jamy ustnej u dzieci z mukowiscydozą

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Udział patogenów komensalnych i oportunistycznych oraz rola mechanizmów ochronnych w rozwoju chorób zębów u dzieci z mukowiscydozą wymagają badań szczegółowych.

**Celem** pracy było określenie cech ekologicznych mikroflory jamy ustnej i niektórych czynników przeciwdrobnoustrojowych śliny u dzieci z mukowiscydozą.

**Materiał i metody.** W pracy dokonano oceny mikroflory jamy ustnej jako złożonego układu ekologicznego, który chroni organizm człowieka przed kolonizacją florą patogenną u dzieci z mukowiscydozą. Przeprowadzono badania bakteriologiczne na materiale klinicznym u 30 dzieci z mukowiscydozą z rozpoznaniem chorób zębów i przyzębia.

**Wyniki.** W badaniu mikrobiologicznym mikroflory jamy ustnej u chorych na mukowiscydozę wyizolowano 70 szczepów patogenów oportunistycznych. Najbardziej znaczące były paciorkowce alfa-hemolizujące (40%). Odsetek bakterii z rodzaju Neisseria u chorych na mukowiscydozę był niższy i wyniósł 24,3%. Grzyby C. albicans wykryto w znacznych ilościach (18,5%), natomiast St. aureus (8,5%) oraz szczepy gram-ujemne E. aerogenes (4,3%) i E. coli (4,3%) istotnie dominowały. Wyniki wskazują, że patogeny oportunistyczne S. aureus, E. aerogenes i E. coli częściowo zastąpiły mikroflorą prawidłową jamy ustnej, takie jak paciorkowce alfa-hemolizujące i niepatogenne gatunki z rodzaju Neisseria u chorych na mukowiscydozę.

**Wnioski.** Mikrobiota płytki nazębnej u dzieci z mukowiscydozą charakteryzuje się poszerzonym spektrum patogenów oportunistycznych wywołanych przez St. aureus, enterobakterie i grzyby C. albicans, co wskazuje na naruszenie mikrobiocenozy z powodu obniżonej odporności błony śluzowej jamy ustnej. Odporność błony śluzowej jamy ustnej u dzieci z mukowiscydozą charakteryzuje się 1,5-krotnym spadkiem aktywności lizozymu i poziomu wydzielniczego IgA.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dzieci, mikrobiocenoza, odporność miejscowa, jama ustna, mukowiscydoza

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The oral microbiota is a complex ecological system that protects the human body from colonization by pathogenic flora. On the other hand, its representatives are the cause of caries and periodontitis, the most common diseases of the oral cavity [6,23]. In addition, systemic disorders such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, tumors may be associated with disruption of the oral ecosystem [1,17]. One of such diseases is mucovi-

scidosis, a genetic disease that mainly affects the respiratory and digestive systems, but all patients have lesions of the oral cavity [20,37]. Systemic diseases characterized by inflammatory processes disrupt the balance of microbiota [7,18].

The most common diseases of the oral cavity, namely dental caries and periodontal diseases associated with microorganisms that form plaque on the tooth surface, which meets all the criteria

of the biofilm [4,31]. The ability of microorganisms to form biofilms is especially evident in mucoviscidosis. Chronic colonization of aggressive pathological microflora in children with cystic fibrosis results in impairment of oral microbiocenosis, which contributes to the development of inflammatory diseases of periodontal tissues, in particular, chronic gingivitis [22,33]. Microbial biofilms are characterized by significant resistance to various factors of local immunity and to antimicrobial agents.

Immunoglobulins sIgA and IgG are one of the main factors of specific protection of the oral cavity, which regulate the adhesion of microorganisms to teeth and mucous membranes [27,39]. Children with hypersensitivity to caries were shown to have a deficiency of secretory immunoglobulins and their increased expression in caries. However, there are opposite data on the correlation between sIgA levels and caries [34,35]. Other antimicrobial factors in saliva are defensins, histatins, cathelicidins, as well as the proteins lactoferrin, lysozyme and lactoperoxidase. Any disturbances in the homeostasis of the immune system or nonspecific resistance can lead to colonization by opportunistic pathogens and infectious diseases of the oral cavity [30,38]. The involvement of commensals and opportunistic pathogens and the role of protective mechanisms in the development of dental diseases in children with cystic fibrosis require more detailed study.

The aim of the study was to determine the ecological characteristics of the oral microbiota and some antimicrobial factors of saliva in children with mucoviscidosis.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research involved assessment of bacteriological studies of clinical material from 30 children with mucoviscidosis (main group) diagnosed with dental and periodontal diseases, and 23 children with inflammatory diseases of the oral cavity without mucoviscidosis (control group). The children under study aged 2 to 17 years. Dental plaque smears were used as clinical material. The etiological significance of the disease was taken into account at the level of microbial count  $10^5$  CFU for bacteria and  $10^3$  CFU for fungi. Isolation of microorganisms and their identification was performed on morphological, cultural and biochemical properties according to regulations [36]. Ecological analysis of plaque microbiota was performed by studying its composition and functional characteristics using the constancy index [31] and the Berger-Parker dominance index [29].

The constancy index was calculated by the formula:  $C\% = p \cdot 100 / P$ , where  $C\%$  is the constancy index,  $p$  is the number of samples in which a certain species was detected,  $P$  is the total number of analyzed samples. Depending on the obtained values, all species were divided into dominant or constant ( $C > 50\%$ ), rare or additional ( $25\% < C < 50\%$ ) and random ( $C < 25\%$ ).

The colonization level or population density of microorganisms was determined by counting colony-forming units of bacteria in 1 ml of clinical material and expressed in decimal logarithm (lg CFU / ml). The relative importance of the most common

species was determined by the Berger-Parker dominance index, which was calculated by the formula:  $d = N_{max} / N$ , where  $d$  is the dominance index,  $N_{max}$  is the number of individuals of the most common species,  $N$  is the number of individuals under study.

Determination of lysozyme activity was performed by bacteriolytic method by hydrolysis of *Micrococcus lysodeikticus* [25] by the formula:  $L_{rel} = L_o / L_k$ , where  $L_o$  is an indicator of lysozyme activity in children with mucoviscidosis, and  $L_k$  is an indicator of lysozyme activity in children of the main group. Immunoglobulin levels of IgM, IgG, IgA and sIgA in saliva were determined by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay.

Statistical processing of the findings was performed using the system software package "STATISTICA 10 Enterprise 10.0.1011.6". The results are presented as arithmetic mean  $\pm$  standard deviation ( $M \pm m$ ). Values of  $p < 0.05$  were considered statistically significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the microbiological study of plaque microbiota, 70 strains of opportunistic pathogens were isolated in patients with mucoviscidosis and 58 strains of opportunistic pathogens in patients with inflammatory diseases of the oral cavity. In children of the main group the most significant were alpha-hemolytic streptococci (40%) (tab. 1), while in patients of the control group the leading place belonged to *Neisseria spp.* (39.7%) and alpha-hemolytic streptococci (36.2%) (tab. 2). The proportion of bacteria of *Neisseria* genus in patients with cystic fibrosis was lower and amounted to 24.3%. In patients of both groups, *C. albicans* fungi were isolated in comparable values (18.5% in the main group, 18.9% in the control group). *S. aureus* (8.5% and 1.7%, respectively), as well as gram-negative strains of *E. aerogenes* (4.3%) and *E. coli* (4.3%) significantly dominated in patients of the main group compared with the control group (tab. 1 and 2). The results indicate that opportunistic pathogens *S. aureus*, *E. aerogenes* and *E. coli* partially replaced the representatives of the normal oral microbiota alpha-hemolytic streptococci and non-pathogenic species of *Neisseria* genus in patients with mucoviscidosis. The growth of the role of *C. albicans* in infectious processes of the oral cavity in patients with mucoviscidosis is also indicated by other researchers [11,28].

Since most oral  $\alpha$ -hemolytic streptococci and non-pathogenic species of *Neisseria* genus play a significant role in maintaining oral homeostasis, reducing their microbial load can lead to caries and mucosal diseases [18,21]. The most common microorganisms were isolated in two- and three-component associations in both groups of children. In most cases, they were joined by staphylococci, *C. albicans* fungi and gram-negative rods in the main group (tab. 1 and 2).

Microorganisms isolated from plaque in patients of the control group were identified only in associations, while in patients with mucoviscidosis 90% of microorganisms were found in associations, and 10% in monoculture (tab. 3). In patients of the control group, most associations were represented by gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria (56.5%), in patients of the

**Table 1.** Species composition of the microbiota isolated from plaque in patients with mucoviscidosis  
**Tabela 1.** Skład gatunkowy mikroflory izolowanej z płytki nazębnej u chorych na mukowiscydozę

Microorganism	Frequency of microorganisms isolation (absolute value /%)			
	General	In monoculture	In two-component associations	In three-component associations
Alpha-hemolytic streptococci	28/40	3/10.7	13/46.4	12/42.9
<i>Neisseria spp.</i>	17/24.3	-	7/41.1	10/58.9
<i>S. aureus</i>	6/8.5	-	2/33.3	4/66.7
<i>E. aerogenes</i>	3/4.3	-	1/33.3	2/66.7
<i>E. coli</i>	3/4.3	-	3/100	-
<i>C. albicans</i>	13/18.6	-	2/15.4	11/84.6
Total	70	3	28	39

**Table 2.** Species composition of the microbiota isolated from plaque of patients in the control group  
**Tabela 2.** Skład gatunkowy mikroflory izolowanej z płytki nazębnej chorych z grupy kontrolnej

Microorganism	Frequency of microorganisms isolation (absolute value /%)			
	General	In monoculture	In two-component associations	In three-component associations
<i>Neisseria spp.</i>	23/39.7	-	12/52.2	11/47.8
Alpha-hemolytic streptococci	21/36.2	-	10/47.6	11/52.4
<i>S. epidermidis</i>	2/3.5	-	2/100	-
<i>S. aureus</i>	1/1.7	-	-	1/100
<i>C. albicans</i>	11/18.9	-	-	11/100
Total	58	-	24	34

**Table 3.** Composition of the microflora (association) isolated from dental plaque of patients  
**Tabela 3.** Skład mikroflory (związku) izolowanego z płytki nazębnej chorych

Microorganisms	Frequency of microorganisms isolation			
	Main group		Control group	
	Absolute quantity	%	Absolute quantity	%
Monoculture	3	10	0	0
Associations:	27	90	23	100
Bacteria + <i>C. albicans</i>	13	48.1	10	43.5
Gram-positive cocci	1	3.8	0	0
Gram-positive cocci + Gram-negative bacteria	13	48.1	13	56.5
Two-component	14	46.7	12	52.2
Three-component	13	43.3	11	47.8

main group such associations were found in 48.1% of cases. In 48.1% of patients with mucoviscidosis and 43.5% of patients with inflammatory diseases of the oral cavity the bacterial microflora was accompanied by *C. albicans* fungi.

The literature provides data on the diversity of microbial consortia that inhabit the oral cavity of patients with mucoviscidosis and which play an active role in the development of inflammatory processes in the oral cavity and respiratory infections [12]. Thus, oral commensal streptococci and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* mutually contribute to the formation of biofilms and colonization [5] with increasing pathogenicity of the latter [9]. Since interactions between different types of microorganisms can potentially affect disease progression, the identification of key agents can help improve the outcome of therapeutic intervention.

Evaluation of the ecological characteristics of plaque microbiota showed that dental and periodontal disease in both groups caused a violation of the microbiocenosis towards a reduction in the role of dominant species. Thus, according to the constancy index, alpha-hemolytic streptococci and non-pathogenic species of *Neisseria* genus in the control group belonged to additional species, and in the main group alpha-hemo-

lytic streptococci also belonged to additional, and *Neisseria spp.* together with other species were rare (tab. 4). *C. albicans* dominated among the rare species in both groups of patients. The level of microbial colonization was significant for streptococci, *Neisseria* and *C. albicans* in both groups (tab. 4).

There are different mechanisms of interspecific interaction in biotopes that affect the population of microorganisms, so the study of these mechanisms and the time course of microbial populations may affect the effectiveness of treatment and disease outcome [24]. The study of immune defense in mucoviscidosis has always received a great deal of attention due to the difficulties in treating bacterial infections [26].

Immune protection of the oral cavity is carried out by antibodies of different classes [19] Secretory IgA is a central component of the immunity of mucous membranes and the first link of protection against cariogenic bacteria [13]. They prevent the penetration of opportunistic pathogens and their toxins into the mucous membranes, and also control the symbiotic relationship between commensals and the host [15,27]. Increased activity and sIgA levels have been found in patients with caries [10]. Secretory immunoglobulins act synergistically with lactoferrin and lysozyme [2].

**Table 4.** Ecological characteristics of the microbiota isolated from dental plaque of patients  
**Tabela 4.** Charakterystyka ekologiczna mikroflory izolowanej z płytki nazębnej chorych

Microorganisms	Groups of patients					
	Main			Control		
	constancy index	dominance index	microbial colonization density lg CFU/g (M + m)	constancy index	dominance index	microbial colonization density lg CFU/g (M + m)
Alpha-hemolytic streptococci	40	1.0	6.18±0.6	36.2	1.09	6.14±0.5
<i>Neisseria spp.</i>	24.3	1.65	5.24±0.8	39.7	1.0	5.48±0.7
<i>S. aureus</i>	8.5	4.67	4.33±0.8	1.7	23.0	4.0±0.0
<i>S. epidermidis</i>	-	-	-	3.5	11.5	4±0.0
<i>E. aerogenes</i>	4.3	9.33	4.67±0.6	-	-	-
<i>E. coli</i>	4.3	9.33	4±0.0	-	-	-
<i>C. albicans</i>	18.6	2.15	4.38±0.7	18.9	2.09	4.45±0.9

Lysozyme is a factor of nonspecific resistance with antimicrobial activity aimed at maintaining microbiocenosis of the oral cavity [11,32]. Low levels of local nonspecific immunity are characterized by decreased enzyme activity. Assessment of lysozyme activity in the saliva of children showed that in patients with mucoviscidosis, this figure was probably 1.5 times lower than in children with oral diseases, but who were not diagnosed with mucoviscidosis (tab. 5). Decreased enzyme levels in adults with mucoviscidosis who had high caries rates have been reported by other researchers [14].

**Table 5.** The content of lysozyme and immunoglobulins in the saliva of children of the main and control groups, mg/l  
**Tabela 5.** Zawartość lizozymu i immunoglobulinu w ślinie dzieci z grup głównych i kontrolnych, mg/l

Groups	Lysozyme, s.u./l	slg A	Ig A	Ig M	Ig G
Control	15.75 ± 1.441	123.2± 9.41	1.95± 0.46	3.32± 0.60	2.02± 0.32
Main	10.47 ± 1.758*	93.03± 15.98*	4.05± 0.77*	5.05± 0.53*	2.92± 0.39*

Note: \* probability of change (p <0.05) compared with the control group

When determining the content of immunoglobulins slgA, IgA, IgM and IgG in the saliva of children, there were significant differences in the levels of all antibodies in children with mucoviscidosis, compared with the control group. Thus, the level of slg A in children of the main group was reduced by 1.5 times, and the concentration of antibodies of other classes was increased, namely IgA by 2 times, IgM by 1.5 times and IgG by 1.4 times compared to indicators of the control group (tab. 5). Decreased activity of secretory immunoglobulins in the saliva of children with cystic fibrosis indicates a weakening of local immunity of the oral cavity, which may contribute to the development of infectious processes. The increase in the level of other classes of antibodies compared to the control group is due to their penetration through the epithelial barrier from the bloodstream to replace the deficiency of slg A [16].

The data of the study show that children with mucoviscidosis develop plaque microbiome from two- and three-component associations of opportunistic pathogens, namely *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Enterobacter*, *Escherichia coli* and *C. albicans*. Decrease in colonization resistance of the oral cavity is caused by weakening of separate links of local immunity which provide resistance of oral tissues to infectious diseases.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Microbiota of plaque in children with mucoviscidosis is characterized by an expansion of the spectrum of opportunistic pathogens due to *Staphylococcus aureus*, *enterobacteria* and *C. albicans* fungi, which indicates a violation of the microbiocenosis due to reduced mucosal immunity.
2. Mucosal immunity of the oral cavity in children with mucoviscidosis is characterized by a 1.5-fold decrease in lysozyme activity and the level of secretory IgA in the saliva of children.

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