Identification of *Shigella flexneri* isolates carrying Shiga Toxin 1-producing gene in Quebec, Canada linked to travel to Haiti.

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<td>Bekal, Sadjia; Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec; Université de Montréal, Département de Microbiologie, Infectiologie et Immunologie; Pilon, Pierre A.; Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal; Université de Montréal, ; Cloutier, Nancy; Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec; Doualla-Bell, Florence; Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec; McGill University, Department of Medicine, Division of Experimental Medicine; Longtin, Jean; Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec; Centre de recherche en infectiologie de l'Université Laval</td>
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Identification of *Shigella flexneri* isolates carrying Shiga Toxin 1-producing gene in Quebec, Canada linked to travel to Haiti.

Sadjia Bekal Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec, Canada/Département de Microbiologie, Infectiologie et Immunologie, Université de Montréal, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Pierre A. Pilon Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal, Québec, Canada

Nancy Cloutier Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec, Canada

Florence Doualla-Bell Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec, Canada/ Department of Medicine, Division of Experimental Medicine, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Jean Longtin Laboratoire de Santé Publique du Québec/Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec, Canada/ Centre de recherche en infectiologie de l’Université Laval, Québec, Canada

Address correspondance to Sadjia Bekal: sadjia.bekal@inspq.qc.ca

Running title: *Shigella flexneri* carrying Stx1 in Quebec, Canada
Shiga toxins (Stx1 and Stx2, also called verocytotoxins) are commonly associated with Shiga
toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) and *Shigella dysenteriae* type 1 (Tesh and O'Brien 1991). Recent
studies have documented cases of *stx* carriage in other *Shigella* species, including *S. sonnei*
linked to travel to Morocco (Nyholm et al. 2015) and *S. flexneri* with travel history to Caribbean
(Gray et al. 2015; Gray et al. 2014). More than forty percent of Shigellosis cases are travel-
related in the province of Quebec (Trepanier et al. 2014). Therefore, a retrospective laboratory
study was performed by the laboratoire de santé publique du Québec to assess the presence of *stx*
gene among the 210 strains of Shigella isolated between 2013 and 2014. The collection included
131 *S. sonnei*, 75 *S. flexneri*, 3 *S. boydii* and 1 *S. dysenteriae* type 12. PCR targeting *stx1* and *stx2*
was performed according to Paton and Paton (Paton and Paton 1998). Three isolates of *S. flexneri*
isolated from stool were positive for *stx1* gene and belonged to serotype 2a (*n*=2) and serotype y,
(*n*=1). The amplified fragments were sequenced and identity was confirmed.

Cases of shigellosis are systematically investigated as provincial regulations of notifiable diseases
permits. The first case was a 62-year-old man of Haitian origin living in Montreal (isolate
ID123699). He was admitted to a hospital for bloody diarrhea, fever, and abdominal pain.
Empirical antimicrobial treatment with ciprofloxacin was prescribed and the patient was
discharged 2 days after admission. The second case was a 55-year-old man of Haitian origin
living in Montreal (Isolate ID132104). Ciprofloxacin was prescribed in an outpatient clinic where
he consulted for bloody diarrhea, fever, and abdominal pain. Both cases developed diarrhea the
day before their return from Haiti. The third case was a 55-year-old man of Haitian origin living
in Montreal (Isolate ID124391). The patient had a non-acute clinical illness with occasional
blood in his stool without fever or abdominal pain. He was treated with ciprofloxacin. Travel
information was unavailable and epidemiological links were not obtainable. No clinical complications including hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) was observed in any of the three patients. Two patients reported foreign travel to Haiti, confirming the finding of Gray et al. (Gray et al. 2014) regarding the local emergence of these strains.

Pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) with XbaI and BlnI enzymes did not demonstrate any close genetic link between the three strains.

Treatment of STEC infection consists of supportive care and the use of antibiotics remains a matter of debate. In contrast, Shigella infections require antibiotic treatment in many instances and early antimicrobial administration was associated with decreased Stx concentrations in stool and a lowered risk of HUS in stx1-S. dysenteriae infections (Bennish et al. 2006). In this study, the 3 patients were successfully treated with ciprofloxacin without complications and this supports handling Stx1-producing S. flexneri in a similar way to S. dysenteriae.

With this recent introduction of S. flexneri isolates carrying Shiga Toxin 1 to Canada, identification of Stx production in Shigella spp. should be furthered studied in order to clarify implications in virulence, treatment, and infection prevention and control management.
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