

Usefulness of radiological and laboratory investigations in food handlers' medical examinations conducted at a specialist occupational health clinic in Harare, Zimbabwe

D Moyo and F Moyo

Abstract

Background: Food handlers' medical examinations are mandated by most countries as a way of safeguarding the health and safety of consumers. Foodborne diseases are an important cause of morbidity and mortality. In Zimbabwe, chest radiographs and throat and rectal swab tests are requirements during food handlers' medical examinations.

Objective: In this study, we explored the patterns and outcomes of physical medical examinations, chest radiographs, and other tests of food handlers.

Methods: A retrospective review of 157 occupational health records of all food handlers who underwent medical examinations in 2019 and 2020 at an occupational health clinic in Zimbabwe was conducted.

Results: The mean age of the study participants was 37 years (21–56 years). Males accounted for 73% of the participants. All rectal swabs were normal and no organisms were cultured. One or more organisms were cultured from 24 (15.3%) throat swabs. One hundred and fifty-two (96.8%) chest radiographs were normal, and 152 (96.8%) food handlers were certified fit to work. Of the 99 food handlers with a recorded body mass index, 36 (36.4%) were overweight or obese. The most common medical conditions were hypertension (n = 10, 6.4%) and high blood pressure (n = 16, 10.2%).

Conclusion: In this study, routine radiological and laboratory testing of food handlers was determined to be of little value. We recommend omitting these costly tests during routine medical examinations of food handlers except where there are clinical indications.