



Investigating the epidemiology of mucosal fungi and its association with COVID-19

**Marwa T. Ahmed¹, Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa²
Harith Ahmed Mustafa³**

¹*Department of medical microbiology, College of Medicine, University of Tikrit, Iraq*
²*Department of Pathological Analysis, College of Applied Sciences, , University of Samarra*

Email: Mohammedalsad3@gmail.com

Tariqmarwa66@gmail.com

³*Department of Pathological Analysis, College of Applied Sciences, University of Samarra, Samarra, Iraq.*

Abstract

This novel disease is caused by a coronavirus (COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2). The world's healthcare system has been brought to its knees by the deadliest epidemic of this millennium, resulting in millions of deaths. To make matters even worse, the entire world, and India in particular, faced another pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic during the second wave in May 2021. This pandemic was caused by mucosal fungi, also known as black mushrooms. Mycosis is a rare form of fungal illness with a high fatality rate and spreads alarmingly. Most of the epidemiological research currently available on mucosal fungus is retrospective and limited. Improving the normal course of this fatal disease requires a high morbidity rate founded on proper risk stratification and enhanced laboratory diagnostics. Both of these factors are essential.

Keywords: COVID-19, Coronavirus, black fungus, mycosis.

Introduction

Strains from the order Mucorales are responsible for causing mucormycosis. The order Mucorales is organized into six families connected to human or animal diseases, while the mucous membrane organs are the primary culprit in most human sickness cases (Ribes et al., 2002). The genera *Absidia*, *Mucor*, *Rizomucor*, and *Rizopus* are all present. *Saksenaceae* and *Cunninghamellaceae* are two other pathogenic families. *Rhizopus* (arrhizus),



though other microbes have also been related to human disease, is the most frequent source of infection in people (Andrews et al., 1997).

Humans contract mycosis when they come into contact with environmental mycosis spores. For instance, infections may develop in the sinuses or lungs after breathing bacteria. Those with health issues or taking medications that weaken the body's defences against infection and disease are more likely to develop this type of mucormycosis. Once the fungus penetrates the skin through cutting, scraping, burning, or other skin trauma, mucormycosis may also develop on the skin (Bauer et al., 1956).

In healthy hosts, Mucoralis spores cause inflammation. Phagocytosis function is usually reduced or absent in the underlying causes of mycosis. The use of illegal drugs and soft skin and tissue illnesses are typically present before an infection. The fungus has many characteristics that contribute to its aggressive growth in patients. The natural thermal endurance of these fungi is one of these characteristics. These fungi adapted to harsh settings thanks to their capacity for fast growth and cell wall remodelling. The specific sensitivity of iron-loaded hosts to this fungal infection supports the significance of iron gain in the pathogenesis of mucosa (Hibbett et al., 2007).

Clinical manifestations of black fungus infection

Mycosis is the name for the fungi-based infections they produce (mucormycosis). These organisms may cause a nose, lung, digestive tract, or skin condition in susceptible individuals, with various clinical symptoms frequently linked to specific endemic diseases (Sugar, 2005). Although these fungi are found in many different environmental settings, their poor pathogenicity in the human host is evidenced by the low occurrence of disorders brought on by zygotes. Contrary to the reported widespread dispersion of fungi, only those with severe disabilities, diabetes, or catastrophic injuries are susceptible to the disease in humans. These illnesses are spreading throughout the planet. Zygotic factors typically enter



the body through the respiratory system. The nasal turbine is where spores are more likely to accumulate and inhale into the pulmonary alveoli (Petrikkos et al., 2012).

In primary cutaneous mycosis, the spores are injected directly into the scraped or covered skin. Then, they might grow and spread. Hospital-associated aspergillosis is more common than mucosal infections; however, the latter have occasionally been linked to restoration or construction work and contaminated ventilation systems. Vesicles contaminated with biomedical equipment have been related to hospital clusters of *Rhizopus* *rhizopodiformis* and *Rhizopus* *microsporus* cutaneous infections. The spores are placed directly into the scraped or covered skin in primary cutaneous mycosis. They could increase and then spread (James et al., 2006).

Transmission of black fungus

Through inhalation, injection, or ingestion, germs can be spread from the environment. Adhesive bandages, wooden tongue inhibitors, hospital linens, negative pressure rooms, waterproofing, ineffective air filtering, non-sterile medical equipment, and architectural engineering are all connected to healthcare-related epidemics, even though most cases are rare. 12-20 Community epidemics have been associated with shock experienced during natural catastrophes (Marty et al., 2004; Andrews et al. The location of the fungus's growth in the body affects the mycosis symptoms. Also, depending on which regions of the body the fungus develops in, the signs of mycosis change (Talmi et al., 2002).

A fluid sample from the respiratory system may be taken and sent to the lab if any sinus or lung symptoms of mycosis appear. It is possible to do a tissue biopsy. A small piece of the afflicted tissue is examined under a microscope or implanted in vitro to look for evidence of mucous fungi. Depending on where the infection is considered, you could also require imaging tests, including computed tomography of the lung, sinuses, or other body areas.



Diagnosis of black fungus

Pathological histology evidence or positive diagnostic results from a sample of the infection site are frequently required to achieve a conclusive diagnosis of mucormycosis. In contrast to innate colonization, samples from sterile body locations are more suggestive of infection. Transplantation from a sample, such as sputum, may benefit people with a clinically consistent mycosis infection. It can be challenging to differentiate micromycetes from other nematode fungi in tissues; specialized microbiological procedures are frequently required. Beta-D-glucan or galactomannan blood tests are not identified as a standard serodiagnosis for mucormycosis. Although DNA-based detection techniques show promise, they are not yet fully standardized or readily available for purchase (LassFlorl, 2009; Perlroth et al., 2007).

Black fungus relationship with coronavirus (COVID-19)

The International Council on Taxonomy of Viruses has classified over 40 coronaviruses (ICTV). They mostly affect mammals. The sixth coronavirus known to infect humans is SARS-COV-2. The names of coronaviruses are written on the viral surface as crown-shaped nails. The severity of the digestive, respiratory, and even central nervous system diseases that coronaviruses can induce varies among the animals they infect. Based on genotyping and serum analysis, coronaviruses were first divided into three categories, 1, 2, and 3. Alpha coronavirus, Betacoronavirus, and Gamma coronavirus are the three genera into which coronaviruses have been divided by the International Commission on the Classification of Virus (ICTV) Coronavirus Study Group (Rouaud et al., 2022). While gama-corona viruses have been found in birds and have recently been confirmed to infect mammals, alpha and beta-corona viruses have both been found in mammals (Mir et al., 2021).

The sickness takes three to seven days to develop fully. Acute respiratory distress syndrome (R.D.S.) and the possibility of creating multiple organ failures are risks connected with the disease's wide spectrum of symptoms, ranging from mild to severe to catastrophic. As a



result, symptoms are regarded as general and can be divided into the following categories (Lal et al., 2020).

Frequent signs and symptoms include phlegm, a cough, fever, and weariness (Pandey et al., 2022). Unusual symptoms include sputum, hemoptysis, headaches, and diarrhoea (Biber et al., 2021). Studies show that pneumonia affects every hospital patient and that more than half of patients require ventilation (cho et al., 2020). There have also been reports of extrapulmonary manifestations, such as those affecting the liver and digestive system, with symptoms like nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea (Coleman et al., 2022).

Clinical symptoms in COVID-19 patients are comparable to those in other illnesses caused by the same family of viruses, such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV. (Deoliveira et al., 2022) More study is required to understand better the newly discovered pathophysiology of the little-understood coronavirus (Mostafa et al., 2022). Yet, the similarity in pathophysiology between MERS and SARS-coronavirus can make understanding SARS-CoV-2 infection easier. When a coronavirus enters and begins to multiply, it first binds to host epithelial cells in the airway utilizing ACE2 receptors. Viral entrance into host cells is mediated by direct membrane fusion between the virus and host cell membrane receptors (ACE2) (Spike protein) (Jamali and coauthors, 2012).

There have been reports of a superior infection in COVID-19 patients, which raises questions regarding another mortality-causing factor (Bartoletti et al., 2020; Koehler et al., 2021). Recent reports of mucosal fungi, sometimes known as "black fungi," have increased, especially in Asian nations like India. The information from 30 COVID-19-related mucosal illness reports/series submitted as of May 14, 2021, was examined in an updated systematic literature review. Of the 99 patients covered, 73, 10, and 6% of the cases originated in India, the U.S.A., and Egypt. Diabetes made up almost 85% of all comorbidities. In 85% of patients, glucocorticoids were used to treat COVID-19. The most prevalent type (42%) was



rhino-orbital mucormycosis, followed by rhino-orbital-cerebral mucormycosis (24%). In 10 cases, pulmonary mucormycosis was discovered at 10% (Pal et al., 2021).

Patients recuperating from COVID who have co-morbid conditions such as diabetes, kidney illness, heart failure, or cancer frequently experience black fungal infections. Patients with Covid recovering from common conditions, including diabetes, kidney disease, heart failure, or cancer, often develop black fungal infections. This infection's symptoms resemble those of COVID-19 and the ordinary flu. If the condition is neglected or not treated, the brain and eye nostrils develop and cause potentially fatal problems (Coleman et al., 2022).

Current information indicates that *Rhizopusarrhizus* is India's main cause of coronavirus-associated mycosis (CAM). Because it causes the infected tissue to turn black, it is sometimes called a "black fungus." Several risk factors, including neutropenia and diabetic ketoacidosis, are present in most instances with mucosal fungal infections, making them potentially fatal (Sahota et al., 2017).

The vast majority of patients have unmanaged diabetes. Apart from the fact that steroid use raises blood sugar levels, COVID-19 can potentially harm pancreatic island cells. Due to increased insulin resistance from the inflammatory response, blood sugar levels may also increase. This shows that the primary cause of the growth of the mucosal fungus is the indiscriminate and protracted use of steroids by physicians caring for moderate Covid-19 patients. According to the guidelines, steroids are only advised when low oxygen levels are present in the middle to severe COVID-19 cases. In diabetic patients, tropical and demential universal mucormycosis (ROCM) is the most prevalent mycosis type. After breathing in *Borangia* fungus spores in the sinuses, infection forms. The Indian Council for Medical Research published a consultation (Sreenivas, 2021).



Treatment and Management

Surgical defibrillation of infected tissue, antifungal therapy, and management of the underlying disease are the cornerstones of mucormycosis treatment, which also benefits from early diagnosis and treatment initiation. The first-line treatment is Amvotierisin B (AmB), followed by posaconazole and isafukunzole if needed (Imran et al., 2021). Mycosis patients in India can be difficult to manage due to a lack of standardized treatment protocols and patients' inability to afford adipose AmB. The alarming rise of mucosal fungus cases in India further exacerbates the lack of AmB.

Contrasting treatment modalities and death rates among India's populace (with the caveat that these figures are derived from the research cited in the main text) (Prakash &Chakrabarti, 2021). The death rate was quite low (50-61% in patients treated with AmB alone) among those who also underwent surgery. These findings align with international statistics (Jeong et al., 2019). As a last resort, butoconazole and isavuconazole have been used to treat mucormycosis. Busakonazole's efficacy and safety in treating ROCM patients in South India were studied. No fatalities were recorded, and 66.6% of patients saw a full remission of their condition, while the rest saw a marked improvement (Menesh et al., 2016). The new antifungal drug Isavukunazole has proven to be just as effective as AmB, its effectiveness in the Indian population has yet to be evaluated due to its recent introduction to the market.

Necrotic tissue excision, heresy, and eye resection (if involved) are all effective treatments. Disease prevention also relies on other therapeutic interventions, such as using disposable or disinfectable P.P.E., maintaining basic hygiene practices, and regularly cleaning and sterilizing humidifiers and respirators (Christopher et al., 2021). After recovering from COVID-19, it is recommended that people return to their "virgin" oral hygiene practices, such as daily brushing, not sharing toothbrush holders, and sanitizing toothbrushes with sanitized mouthwash after each use.



Conclusions

Some countries classified mucosal illness as a "reported disease" after COVID-19-associated mycosis increased. This will illuminate illness burden, population features, risk factors, clinical spectrum, and patient outcomes. Due to high demand, Amphoterycin-Bmphotericine-price B's skyrocketed, making this crucial for preventing a black market. Our findings suggest that COVID-19 patients using corticosteroids, including those without diabetes (weakly managed) and outside the intensive care unit, should be mindful of gaseous mucosal mycosis. Invasive mycosis diagnosis requires early surgery and specific antifungal therapy. Oxygen patients should clean and replenish their moisturizers. Fungi can grow on wet surfaces to prevent leaks. Fungal infections can occur weeks or months after COVID-19 healing; thus, one should not ignore the warning signs and symptoms. Doctors recommend using steroids judiciously. Mass vaccination of the population, sharing health information, and building community trust are important primary healthcare measures that can protect everyone during COVID-19 (World Health Organisation).

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